PERMANENTE MEDICINE®
The Permanente Medical Group

Anger Management

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KAISER PERMANENTE®

CHAPTER 2

THE COSTS OF ANGER

It's Thursday morning. George has been working on the Whitehorse account all week when his boss calls him into the office and tells him to drop everything and start working on the Twingle project. George feels victimized. The Twingle project is much less prestigious than the Whitehorse account. It's not fair—he was just starting to get into it, and now he's out. He's upset, and tells his boss so in no uncertain terms, storming out of the office.

On the face of it, George's anger in this situation seems justified. And his display of strong feelings might even serve to let his boss know about his degree of commitment. Perhaps the boss will realize that his decision was unfair, and change his mind.

Perhaps. But let's look at more of George's behavior to get a better perspective. This is not the first time that he's blown up at work. In fact, there have been three other episodes in the past thirty days alone. First, there was the incident with the equipment supplier, who admittedly was two days late delivering a part that George needed. Then there was the angry exchange with a coworker about who had priority using the copy machine. Worst of all was that misunderstanding with a customer who had complained to his boss. Maybe the customer was being unreasonable, his boss had said, but that was no excuse for George to be sarcastic and rude.

On further analysis, it turns out that George has lost two previous jobs because of conflicts at work, and he's received low performance evaluations for poor people skills. But the picture is even worse in his personal life. His wife filed for divorce eighteen months ago saying she couldn't stand living with him anymore. He's also been estranged from his sixteen-year-old daughter ever since he blew up and made a scene at her birthday party. And even his brother won't talk to him anymore after that incident at the bowling alley. To top it off, a recent physical found that George has high blood pressure.

Taken one at a time, each of the events referred to above might be justified or understandable. But added together, they point to a chronic anger pattern that is emotionally and physiologically damaging.

Physiological Costs of Anger

There's nothing wrong with occasional, moderate anger. It creates no lasting harm. But chronic, sustained anger can be a serious problem. By keeping the body in a constant state of emergency, chronic anger can contribute to hypertension, heart disease, and increased mortality from *all* causes. This chapter will begin by exploring what we know about how anger impacts your health. Later we'll look at the emotional and interpersonal costs of chronic anger.

Anger and Hypertension

"High" blood pressure can be understood by thinking about garden hoses. Let's say that you have two garden hoses, one a half-inch in diameter and the other a quarter-inch in diameter. If you attach the half-inch hose to the faucet and turn the valve all the way you will get a steady stream of water. However, if you attach the quarter-inch hose to the same faucet, and turn the valve all the way as before, you will get a much stronger stream. Anger is associated with high levels of norepinephrine, which tends to constrict blood vessels. This raises blood pressure as surely as if you had switched to a smaller diameter hose.

The idea that unexpressed anger (anger-in) could lead to high blood pressure has been circulating for more than half a century. In 1939, Franz Alexander suspected that his hypertensive patients were having trouble with feelings of anger and an inability to express them. This failure to express angry feelings, he argued, could lead to chronic activation of the sympathetic nervous system, and high blood pressure. Research as early as 1942, by Hamilton, confirmed that unexpressed anger was inextricably linked to hypertension. In 1982, Diamond reviewed four decades of research involving the role of anger and hostility in essential hypertension and coronary heart disease. He described the hypertensive individual as someone "ridden with hostility and constantly guarding against impulse expression." In the same year, Gentry studied the effects of habitual anger coping styles on over a thousand subjects. With this larger sample, he showed categorically that chronic suppressed anger increased the risk for hypertension.

Research by Dimsdale and associates (1986) once again confirmed that higher blood pressure is significantly related to suppressed anger. In fact, "normotensives" were twice as likely as"hypertensives" to be free of suppressed anger. All in all, there are dozens of studies linking anger-in with hypertension. You will find the most significant of these listed in the appendix.

It's clear from the research literature that the inability (or unwillingness) to express anger contributes to the development of hypertension for many susceptible people. But that's only half the story. As it turns out, people who tend to show more hostility and act more aggressively towards others (anger-out) also have higher blood pressure rates than normal.

In a 1979 study, Harburg and his associates asked people how they would deal with an angry and arbitrary boss. People's responses were categorized into three different coping strategies. The first, walking away from the situation (anger-in), was associated with people who had high blood pressure readings. The second strategy, protestation (anger-out), included behaviors such as confronting the boss or reporting him to the union. This strategy was associated with people whose blood pressure was even higher than those using the walk-away coping style. A third group used a style dubbed "reflection." These people, who said that they would try to talk to the boss later, after he had cooled down, were found to have the lowest blood pressure rates.

A host of other studies (see the Appendix for a sampling) all confirm the basic hypothesis that chronically expressed anger is associated with high blood pressure and hypertension. So it doesn't matter whether anger is suppressed or allowed to blow. Either way, your blood pressure tends to go up. It's the anger itself that's harmful, not the choice to express it or hold it back.

Anger, Hostility, and Cardiovascular Disease

In the 1950s, San Francisco cardiologists Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman began their seminal work on the psychosocial risk factors that underlie blocked arteries, angina pains, and heart attacks. Eventually they were able to identify a cluster of personality traits that appeared to be linked to coronary heart disease. Using the nonpejorative term "type A," they described someone who had the traits of time urgency (always in a hurry) and competitiveness. In addition, this person was highly ambitious, hyperaggressive, and experienced free-floating hostility. The type A person can be seen as someone seething with anger, always ready to boil over.

In the 1960s Friedman and Rosenman (as reported in the classic, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart,* 1974) conducted the massive Western Collaborative Group Study on 3,500 healthy men. Eighty percent of those men who had heart disease could be classified as "type A." Over the eight-and-a-half-year course of the study, type A men were twice as likely to have heart attacks as type Bs. Rosenman (1985), in his reanalysis of the Western Collaborative Group Study data, found that the anger-hostility dimension proved to be crucial. It was, in Rosenman's words, "the dominant characteristic among the coronary prone type A behaviors."

Evidence from the Western Electric Study, done by Shekelle and associates in 1983, tends to corroborate Rosenman's findings. Of the 1,877 men studied in Chicago, those who scored high on a hostility scale were one and a half times more likely to have a heart attack than men who had lower hostility scores. Further corroboration comes from a follow-up study of 255 male physicians who completed the Hostility Scale while in medical school. Men who scored at the median or below in hostility had one-sixth the incidence of coronary heart disease twenty-five years later, compared to those who had scored higher on the scale (Barefoot et al. 1983).

Heart disease starts early for those who are chronically angry. Grunnbaum and his research group (1997) studied the association between anger or hostility and coronary heart disease in children and adolescents. Their review of epidemiological studies uncovered a strong connection between anger and pathologic changes in the arteries of young school-age children. For additional research on the relationship between hostility and coronary heart disease, see the appendix.

So far we've described research showing that the *feeling* of hostility is related to heart disease. But there is also abundant evidence that *expressed* hostility is strongly associated with coronary artery disease—*for people of all ages*. Kawachi and associates (1996) conducted a seven-year follow-up study of 1,305 men. They concluded that high levels of expressed anger are a risk factor for cardiac heart disease among older men. Siegman and associates (1987) found that expressed hostility was related to the severity of coronary artery disease in patients 60 years or younger.

The evidence is clear and overwhelming. Chronic anger and hostility can cause serious damage to your heart and arteries.

Anger, Hostility, and Death from All Causes

In 1989, the *New York Times* carried an article reporting on the results of a twenty-five-year follow-up study of law students. Among other health evaluations, the law students had taken a test measuring hostility. A striking fact emerged from this study. Twenty percent of those who had scored in the top quarter on the hostility scale were dead. This was compared to a death rate of only 5 percent for those students who had scored in the lowest quarter on the same test.

Similar results were found by Shekelle and associates in 1983. A twenty-year follow-up study of nearly two thousand initially disease-free employees of the Western Electric Company showed that high hostility scores were related to increased mortality *from all causes*.

The Finnish Twin Cohort study (Koskenvuo, et al. 1988) provides corroborating evidence from a different culture. Using a simple three-item hostility measure and a sample of 3,750 men, they found that high self-ratings of hostility were associated with increased all-cause mortality over a three-year follow-up period.

Clearly, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that chronic anger and hostility can lead to overall poorer health, and even a likelihood of premature death.

Emotional and Interpersonal Costs of Anger and Hostility

While the physiological effects of anger, such as hypertension and artery disease, can become dramatically obvious, the emotional and interpersonal effects are more subtle. It may simply be a lonely feeling as friendships drift away. Or a sense of isolation at work because colleagues avoid making contact. Or a lack of intimacy in personal relationships as your partner becomes more guarded.

A host of studies (see the appendix) have found that high scores on hostility are associated with fewer and less satisfactory social supports. Greenglass (1996), for example, studied a sample of 252 male and 65 female managers in Canada. Those with high scores on anger-in reported receiving less support from family members. They also reported less trust in their close relationships.

Jerry Deffenbacher and his colleagues (see the appendix for a full list of research articles) have done the most extensive research on how chronic anger affects personal and work relationships. For example, Hazaleus and Deffenbacher (1986) found that 45 percent of angry males in their sample had suffered a terminated or damaged relationship during the previous year. Among other results, Deffenbacher (1992) found that angry individuals suffer significant disruptions in work or school performance, and that high anger people drink more alcohol and get drunk more often. Houston and Kelley (1989) also reported a strong relationship between anger scores and overall levels of conflict in both the family of origin and current marriages.

In 1981, Jones and his associates, found a significant relationship between hostility and loneliness. Angry people end up feeling painfully disconnected from others. When Hansson and associates reviewed the research on loneliness in 1984, they found that anger cuts people off from social support in two ways. Angry people have cynical attitudes toward others, and are therefore unable to recognize support when it's available. Similarly, their unrealistic and overly demanding expectations make the available support seem not "good enough." No matter how sincerely interested others may be in helping, the angry person is unable to experience or appreciate that support.

It's clear that angry people keep others at arm's length. In so doing, they experience less support and a greater sense of loneliness than their less hostile peers.

Assessing the Cost of Anger for You

Using the worksheets on the next page, we want you to make an honest assessment of all the ways in which anger has had a negative impact on your life. Once you have completed the exercise, it may become much clearer exactly how much anger has cost you personally. You will be ready to move on to the next chapter, which will help you to understand your anger.

PERSONAL COSTS OF ANGER—Worksheet

In the spaces provided below, write brief descriptions of how anger has affected you in each area. Put an asterisk by any numbered item that feels like a crucial reason for you to learn more about anger management.

1. How anger has affected my work relationships (include jobs lost or jeopardized):

2. How anger has affected the relationships to my family of origin (including parents, siblings, and extended family):

3. How anger has affected my marriage or intimate/romantic relationships:

4. How anger has affected my children:

5. How anger has affected my friendships (including lost friends and strained relationships):

6. How my anger has harmed people who aren't family or friends (including the names of all the people my anger has hurt—on a separate sheet if necessary):

7. How my anger has affected my health and physical well-being (including stress-related illnesses/problems and physical discomfort from anger reactions):

8. How anger has endangered me (including reckless driving, physical fights, hurting myself by hitting things, legal problems, etc.):

continued on next page

PERSONAL COSTS OF ANGER—Worksheet cont.

9. How anger has affected me financially (include bad decisions made in anger as well as material things broken or damaged):

10. How anger has affected me spiritually (including bad behavior that goes against my personal code of ethics or sense of right and wrong):

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ANGER

You're reading this workbook because you're concerned about your anger. It's affecting important relationships and hurting those you care about. Perhaps it's getting you in trouble at work, while driving, or with store clerks. Maybe you're breaking things. Or it may even be affecting your health. With all the negatives associated with anger, why are you still blowing up? Why does anger remain such a powerful force in your life? Why, even when you resolve to control it, does your anger still flare up? In this chapter you'll find answers to these questions. A good place to start is understanding the five short-term payoffs that anger can provide.

Anger Payoffs

1. Anger reduces stress. Stress can come from a lot of sources—worry, frustration, unmet needs, physical pain or discomfort, rushing against deadlines, and so on. You don't need this book to tell you about your stress. What's important is the link between stress and anger. Stress creates physiological arousal—tension. The greater the stress, and the number of stressors, the more unpleasant is the arousal you feel.

   Anger discharges arousal, but only temporarily. Right after a blowup, people often feel oddly relaxed, like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders. It seems like they can breathe again. Even though these effects are brief, and tension soon returns, the anger discharge can be highly reinforcing. You get a break from everything that frustrates and overwhelms you.

   But there's a downside to using anger for stress reduction. The stress comes back with a vengeance. Studies show that anger creates more anger. Blowing up makes it more likely that you'll blow up again soon. Each time you indulge in anger to cope with stress, the next outburst becomes that much easier and stronger—and harder to control.

   Not only does your anger get worse, but so does the anger of those around you. They get hurt and defensive. They counterattack. And they harden, becoming less and less concerned about your needs and feelings.

Short-term, then, anger is a good strategy for discharging stress arousal. But it tends to boomerang. Later, you pay dearly in the coin of broken relationships.

2. Anger hides emotional pain. Anger is a good defense against fear, loss, guilt, shame, and feelings of rejection or failure. It puts a tight lid on painful emotions, locking most of the feelings out of awareness. Growing up in dysfunctional families, we watch Dad push away his shame with rage. Or Mom cope with her depression by yelling at the kids. We learn that we can stop virtually any painful feeling if we can just get mad enough.
   But once again, the short-term payoff has long-term consequences. First of all, you don't let yourself experience feelings that may be important signals, offering guidance for what you need to do or stop doing in your life. Maybe there's a good reason you feel guilt, and you need to face it and do something about it. Maybe you need to face your depression, taking responsibility to make key changes in your life.
   The second problem with using anger to defend against your feelings is that the feelings often get worse over time. You're not only guilty for some past failure—now you feel guilty for the new damage your anger has done. Or the depression worsens because your anger is turning people off and isolating you. Now you have to crank up your anger even more to block these higher levels of guilt or sadness.
   The third problem with using anger as a defense is that it becomes habitual. The anger reflex seems to go off at the slightest criticism or hurt, or the slightest anxiety. Say you're a little worried while trying to figure out the bills. Boom! It's a lot easier to blow up because your partner bought a sixty-dollar espresso maker than to feel uncertainty about your finances.

3. Anger gets you attention. Sometimes it seems that no one listens to you unless you're yelling. Anger does grab people's attention. They get alarmed and sometimes they'll try to placate you. But once again, the immediate payoff has long-term outcomes that hurt you. First, a certain percentage of people don't respond to anger with attentive listening. They get immediately defensive and tune you out. They start avoiding you or, worse, they hold it against you. The problem is that you've chosen a strategy that makes some people sit up and listen, and some people run.
   The second problem with using anger to get attention is that the people who responded initially get inured and hardened over time. They stop being alarmed by your anger and start being disgusted by it. Instead of listening, they resent you and shut down.

4. Anger may be used for punishment and revenge. Someone really lets you down. They screw up because they're lazy or stupid or don't care about you. Inside is this huge wave of rage. You want to punish them and teach them a lesson. You want them to feel as much pain as you do. God, it feels good. This righteousness, this will to harm, is so powerful that it's all you care about. You hunger for the opportunity to get back at them—whether it's a screamed insult or a carefully planned revenge.
   The trouble is, each time you act on these impulses, you make enemies, and the enemies often end up being the people you love and need most. Naturally, your enemies want to punish *you*. The world becomes a stage for bitter struggles, where old hurts and grudges push each of you to new excesses of rage and aggression.

5. Anger helps you change others. In dysfunctional families, we learn to use anger to extort things from others. We coerce them with blowups, or the fear of blowups, into complying with our demands. It's tempting to use anger as a club because, at least in the short term, people often give you what you want.

In the long run, of course, they turn off and turn away from you. They resent being controlled by fear. But worst of all is what it does to you. Using your anger to change others leaves you feeling helpless. When you're in pain, when something hurts, it always seems like the other person has to fix it. You feel powerless to overcome the problem yourself. And all you know how to do is try to coerce the other person into corrective action.

By placing the responsibility to change a painful situation outside yourself, you are starting down the royal slippery slope toward helplessness and depression. You're leaving others in charge of your pain and your life.

Exercise: What Are Your Anger Payoffs?

In this exercise you'll identify which of the five anger payoffs are influencing you. Don't be surprised if all or most are playing a part in your anger. For each anger payoff listed below, do a mental inventory of relationships and situations in your life (e.g., anger with family, friends, kids, coworkers, boss, clerks, receptionists; road anger; anger at objects, etc.). See if that payoff is in any way influencing or reinforcing your anger. If so, select a typical example and write it in the space provided.

1. Reduce stress—using anger to discharge stress-related arousal.

2. Hide emotional pain—using anger to defend against shame, guilt, depression, anxiety, and so on.

3. Get attention—using anger to alarm people so they'll listen to you.

4. Punishment and revenge—using anger to make people feel as much pain as you do.

5. Change the behavior of others—using anger to coerce people to do what you want.

You're now aware of some of the key factors that reinforce your anger and why anger has such powerful short-term effects. But there's more you need to know. To have a better chance at managing your anger, you'll need to understand the psychological mechanisms that create it. What follows is an explanation of the components of the anger response.

How You Get Angry

Anger is a two-step process. It starts with the experience of pain. The pain can be physical or emotional—it could be a stomachache or fatigue, feelings of rejection or loss. The pain can be something that frustrates your needs or threatens your safety. The particular kind of pain doesn't matter. What's important is that the pain by definition is unpleasant and makes you want to put an end to it. The second component of the anger response is trigger thoughts. These are interpretations, assumptions, and evaluations of a situation that make you feel victimized and deliberately harmed by others. Trigger thoughts blame and condemn others for the painful experience you've suffered.

You might think of emotional or physical pain as the fuel of anger. It's like a can of gasoline, and your trigger thoughts are the match. Either of the anger components alone is harmless. Pain by itself doesn't ignite rage, and trigger thoughts without pain are like a match without fuel.

Pain *plus* trigger thoughts equals anger. It's a simple formula. Imagine that you have a headache and your fourteen-year-old starts nagging you about going to a party that will involve drinking. She keeps pushing, and your head keeps pounding. Her pressure and the pain in your head aren't enough to get angry. You need a match—a trigger thought that says she's an inconsiderate kid who doesn't give a damn about how tired you are. Now the anger catches fire. You're hurting, and you have someone to blame. You've decided who's responsible for your pain. The next words out of your mouth are loud and attacking. Your daughter stares at you like you just went nuts, but in reality it was a simple matter of putting the fuel and match together.

Once you get angry, trigger thoughts can also make it worse. They can escalate your upset by continually painting the other person as bad and wrong and deliberately out to harm you. Each new trigger thought pushes your anger a notch higher, until you end up saying and doing very damaging things. Pain begets trigger thoughts, which beget anger, more trigger thoughts, more anger, and so on. Your thoughts and angry feelings become a self-perpetuating feedback loop.

Exercise: The Anger Log

The Anger Log is a tool that provides an opportunity to learn more about the components of your anger response. The log is divided into seven columns. The first column is labeled Pain/Stress; there you record the emotional and physical pain that existed before your anger. It might be a headache or anxiety about your marriage. It might be a frustrated need, or pressure to get a job done. The stress or pain might have gone on for hours preceding your anger, or it might be a

direct outgrowth of the provocative situation. Try to include here every stressful or painful experience you can think of that might be influencing your anger response.

The next column is labeled Provocative Situation. Here you briefly note the upsetting event that preceded your anger. The third column, Trigger Thoughts, is where you write down what you're thinking while getting angry. These thoughts tend to label the provoking person as wrong, or bad, or harming you in some way. The fourth column is Anger Rating. Here you'll write in a number, from 0 to 100, that reflects how angry you felt. Zero would indicate no anger, whereas 100 is the highest level of rage you can imagine experiencing. When you rate each anger experience, you make a subjective judgment about where your anger falls on the continuum between those two extremes. The fifth column is labeled Behavior. Here you record what you actually *did* in response to your anger. Did you yell or speak sharply? Did you curse or call the other person names? Did you say something attacking or belittling? Were you in any way physically aggressive—shoving, shaking, hitting?

The last two columns are labeled Outcome. Here you'll note the effect of your anger on yourself and others. First of all, rate the impact from a -10 to +10 in terms of how you felt and what happened to you subsequent to your anger. Write a brief description of the emotional and objective consequences of your anger. Did you feel sad, relieved, scared? Did anything change in terms of your relationships to others? Were there consequences that you regret and that impacted you negatively? Now go through the same process in terms of how your anger may have impacted others. If you have any sense of how your anger affected them, rate it on the same -10 to +10 scale. Also note anything they said or did that appeared related to your anger.

What follows are two examples of actual Anger Logs filled out by Ginny and Ralph. Ginny is a thirty-seven-year-old X-ray technician. She's married to Bob and has a twelve-year-old son, Barry. Ralph is a fifty-one-year-old flight instructor who has a rocky relationship with his girlfriend, Laura.

Ginny's Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others
1. Feeling frustrated and hurt.	*Barry refuses to finish cleaning up living room during Saturday morning family work time*	*He's defying me, trying to upset me I've had enough of his lazy shit.*	*75*	*Yelled and physically pulled him back to living room.*	*-7 I was disgusted with myself for losing it.*	*-7He pouted the rest of the day.*
2. Have a head-ache; feeling frus-trated	*Ordered clothes froma catalog that came in the wrong size.*	*Stupid, careless people.*	*60*	*Yelled at order clerk; called her a jackass.*	*-2 Felt better for a moment, then depressed about how easily I lose control.*	*?*
3. Anxious about next day dental visit for root canal; very tired	*Helping Barry do home work he putoff till late at night.*	*Same old last-minute lazy shit. He puts everything off and just assumes I'll do it.*	*50*	*Told Barry in a harsh voice that he's driving me crazy; gave him silent treatment after that.*	*+1 For some reason I felt like I got through to him.*	*-5 Barry cried.*
4. Stress from deadline at work;sadness and anxiety re Bob's recent complaints about marriage.	*Bob asked me topick up some barbecue briquettes.*	*He knows red meat is no good for me. He doesn't give a damn about my heatlh.*	*80*	*Told him he doesn't give a rat's ass about any thing but himself.*	*-9 I felt very depressed.*	*-8 Bob stormed out to get briquettes and was yelling about divorce.*
5. Sadness about stateof marriage; frus trated because I wanted to go to movies but couldn't because of pain from root canal.	*Bob asked about Barry's C- in English.*	*He leaves me with all the responsibility for Barry's schoolork. He pays no attention.*	*55*	*Got really sharp and told him it was his own fault for ignoring the problem.*	*-5 Felt more depressed.*	*-7 Bob got really upset and left. Barry overheard and started crying. Had to comfort him.*

Ralph's Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others
1. Tired from party last night. Anxious because boss gets irritated when I'm late.	*Some one cut in front of me at the bridge toll plaza.*	*Asshole thinks he owns the road. He needs a lesson in courtesy.*	70	*Shouted out the window and kept honking the horn.*	*-3 Felt upset and couldn't calm down.*	?
2. Feel invisible, like I don't count. Old feeling from growing up.	*Laura gets reservation at an Indian restaurant. Indian food burns my stomach.*	*It's all about her; it's all what she wants.*	75	*Told her to cancel reservation. Refused to go; acted very cold.*	*-7 Depressed, lonely. Destroying the relationship.*	*-5 She left in a huff, hasn't called.*
3. Shame, feeling forced to do something. Also worried about money because fewer people call for flying lessons.	*Mother calls from a bar drunk and wants me to drive her home.*	*She doesn't give a shit. She's been doing this to me too long.*	90	*Told her to f.o. and hung up.*	*+5 Felt kind of relieved and relaxed.*	*-3 Called her later —she hardly remembered.*
4. Feeling pressured, worried about money.	*Frequent flying student demands that I lower my rates.*	*Cheap bastard, he's got the money, he's just trying to screw me.*	70	*Raised my voice and told him to go find another flight instructor.*	*-9 Lost a student and needed income.*	?
5. Feeling lonely, worried about money, kind of a hunger headache.	*Laura calls last minute to say she has to work late and let's skip dinner tonight.*	*Doesn't give a shit about me. Just kisses up to her boss; probably doesn't have to stay. She wants to.*	80	*Raised voice on phone. Told her she should think about me once in a while instead of kissing up to every one else.*	*-8 Very lonely and depressed.*	*? She laughed and said she wouldn't come home at all; hung up on me*

Now it's time to get some practice filling out your own log. On the blank Anger Log provided, fill in all the anger experiences you've had from the past week that you'd rate above 40 on the scale. If it's under 40 don't include it. Make sure you fill out the log for at least five experiences. If there weren't five in the last week, keep looking back to previous weeks until you're able to list the minimum five experiences.

As you fill out the log, be careful to differentiate between pain/stress and the provocative situation. Remember, pain/stress is what you felt physically or emotionally *before* getting angry that may have contributed to your anger response. The provocative situation is the actual event your anger focused on. Try to write down as many key trigger thoughts as possible. Later, after filling out a number of Anger Logs, you'll be able to identify themes in your trigger thoughts. When you recognize and understand the kinds of thoughts that most upset you, you'll have taken a first major step toward changing these anger triggers.

Right now, go ahead and fill in the blank Anger Log based on upsets from the past week.

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

Now that you've recorded at least five significant anger episodes from the past week, there are several important questions you should consider:

- What types of stresses or pain typically foreshadow high anger episodes? Are any of these stresses preventable? Could they be calmed or coped with in ways other than anger?
- What types of provocative situations are typically associated with high anger episodes? Is there a common theme or dynamic to high anger situations?
- What category of trigger thought most angers you (i.e., feeling treated unjustly, not being cared about, being ignored, blaming others, negative labels like stupid or selfish, assuming ill will, etc.)?
- Do you behave differently in response to moderate (50–60) anger as opposed to high (75–85) anger experiences? How would you like to change the way you express your anger?
- Are the outcomes more negative for high (75–85) as opposed to moderate (50–60) anger experiences?
- Are the outcomes from your anger experiences more often positive or negative? If negative, are the outcomes affecting you temporarily or also in the long term?
- Is your anger affecting others in ways that concern you?
- Are there specific trigger thoughts or trigger thought themes that seem to generate the most negative outcomes?
- Are there particular behaviors that seem to trigger more negative outcomes, either for yourself or others?

You'll return to these questions again after completing Anger Logs for the next several weeks. However, it's good to start asking them now, because careful observation of your anger helps to build motivation to complete the anger control program.

Exercise: Monitoring Your Anger

Using the blank Anger Log on the next page and making as many copies as you need, record all anger experiences over 40 on the scale during the coming week. Review your day at a consistent point each evening (for example, right at bedtime) and fill in all seven columns for all significant anger episodes. This is important work; that's why it's necessary to make a strong commitment to see it through. If you suspect you'll have difficulty maintaining the log, make a contract with a friend, and ask him or her to check in with you about your progress with the log.

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

CHAPTER 4

RELAXATION SKILLS I

Learning to relax is an essential element in achieving anger management. Remember, getting angry is a two-step process. First, physical tension or stress has to exist in the body, then it requires anger-triggering thoughts to complete the picture. Half the anger battle can be won by simply learning to relax the physical tension that develops in provocative situations. It's a proven fact that if you can relax your body, and keep it relaxed, it's almost impossible to get angry. Combating stress using the skills you're about to learn can help you calm down, think clearly, and handle any situation in an effective, positive way. The eventual goal is to become so good at relaxing that you can let go of tension any time, anywhere, in thirty seconds or less.

The first step to effective relaxation is a technique called *progressive relaxation training*. It's been around since the 1920s in one form or another, and is generally regarded as the keystone to successful stress release. Keep in mind the technique described below is not as easy as it sounds. It requires practice and a commitment to follow through. But the results are well worth the effort, paying off big dividends in anger management.

Progressive Relaxation Training:

The basic principle is to first increase the tension in your muscles, hold it for five to seven seconds, and then *relax.* Remember to focus on one set of muscles at a time. Repeat each procedure as many times as necessary to achieve the desired effect. (*Caveat:* Do not tense areas of physical pain, injury, or recent surgery. And remove contact lenses.)

1. Get into a comfortable seated position and give your body a chance to relax. Allow yourself to experience a comfortable feeling of heaviness. Now, start at the bottom and, stretching your legs out, point your toes (like a *ballerina*) away from your body, noting the tension in your ankles. Now point your *toes to head*, creating tension in your calves. Let your feet fall to the floor, take a deep breath, and relax.

2. Now tighten your buttocks (remember *tight bottom*), and then your thighs by pressing down on your heels as hard as you can. Hold the tension (five to seven seconds), then let go, take a deep breath, and relax.

3. Take a deep breath, filling up your lungs completely, and flex your chest muscles. Now tighten your stomach muscles, creating, in effect, a *coat of armor.* Hold, then exhale, and relax.
4. Now arch your back, as though it were a bow (remember *bow and arrow*). Avoid straining and keep the rest of your body as relaxed as possible. Notice the tension beginning down at your coccyx (tailbone), and moving all the way up your spine to your neck. Hold as long as possible, then slump forward, take a deep breath, and relax.
5. Bend your elbows and tense your forearms and biceps in the classic *Charles Atlas* pose. Clench your fists at the same time. Tense these muscles until they feel taut. Then, straighten out your arms, shake out your hands, take a deep breath, and relax.
6. Now hunch your shoulders and pull your head in like a *turtle.* Press your chin against your chest, tightening your throat. Experience this uncomfortable sensation, then drop your shoulders and allow your head to fall forward. Now, slowly and carefully, roll your head to the side and back of your neck. Reverse direction and roll your head the other way. Take a deep breath, and allow your neck and shoulders to relax.
7. Continue to move your attention upwards toward your head and face. First, make a frown by wrinkling up your forehead (like a *walnut*) as tightly as you can. Next, scrunch up your eyes, flare your nostrils, clench your jaw (not so hard that you'll crack a tooth). Finally, compress your lips into a tight O. Pull your lips as tight as a *miser's purse strings.* In short, make an *ugly face.* Hold it, tighter and tighter. Then relax and let go. Now, take a deep breath, relax your lips, and blow out forcefully.
8. Now go back mentally over the entire procedure, and feel the relaxation in your feet, ankles, calves, back, and chest. As you let go, more and more, the relaxation deepens in your neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. Go deeper and deeper into being relaxed. Finally, feel the relaxation extend to your head and face, your jaw hanging loose and your lips slightly parted.
9. If some tension persists in a specific part of your body, simply return your focus to that spot. Increase the tension, hold it, take a deep breath, and then relax. And let go.

In order to achieve deep muscle relaxation quickly, remember *key words* in the list below. Tense muscle groups for five to seven seconds, then relax for fifteen seconds.

Key Words

- Toes like a ballerina
- Toes to head
- Tight bottom
- Coat of armor
- Bow and arrow
- Charles Atlas
- Turtle
- Walnut
- Miser's purse
- Ugly face

What Does Relaxation Feel Like?

A feeling of deep relaxation can be experienced in lots of different ways. Most people describe tingling sensations, heat, or a pleasant warmth moving through their body. Others focus on feelings of heaviness or general lassitude. For some, their muscles feel like a stick of butter slowly melting in a skillet, or maple syrup spreading over a pile of pancakes. Everyone experiences relaxation in a unique way.

Exercise: How Relaxation Feels to You

Go back to the box (above) containing the key words for progressive relaxation training. As you go through the relaxation process again, notice the specific relaxation sensations that you feel for each muscle group. Now write those down next to the key words. This will serve to reinforce, and deepen, the relaxation you already experience.

Relaxation Imagery

Another very valuable tool in combating stress is the ability to call up, at a moment's notice, a peaceful, relaxing scene. Eventually, with enough practice, you will be able to conjure this scene as an automatic reflex, and it will help you to achieve better control when faced with a stressful situation.

It's best to begin using *relaxation imagery* right after having practiced the progressive relaxation procedure. This allows you to capitalize on the good feelings that you have already created.

The idea is to think about, and visualize in detail, a time and place where you have felt especially safe, secure, and perfectly at peace. It sometimes helps to begin the process by imagining that you are walking down a path through the woods, with many trees on the left and right. Eventually you see a light at the end of the path, and come to a meadow. Here is a peaceful clearing, where the sun is always shining, warming your skin, and the grass smells lush. You can hear the tinkling of a brook nearby.

Perhaps it's just this meadow that you were looking for, or maybe you'll want to follow the road leading to the beach, where the waves come and go, caressing the white sand. The salty smell in the air clears your mind, and the sound of the waves lulls you into a peaceful, almost hypnotic state.

Or, you can see in the distance a cottage tucked into the side of a hill, with smoke lazily rising from the chimney. It's cozy in front of the fireplace. The smell of your favorite soup wafts from the kitchen and permeates the air, bringing back warm, nurturing memories.

Now it's time to create your own personal relaxation image. Perhaps one of the scenarios above triggered a memory for you. Or maybe a childhood scene, a time of innocence, will work for you.

Begin creating your scene slowly, with your eyes closed, sketching it in broad strokes like an artist preparing a major canvas. Visualize the scene and then anchor it to a specific time and place (e.g., 3 P.M. on a lazy afternoon on August 20th, 1985, in the Catskills mountains). Now start to fill in the details. Shapes and colors, the quality of light and shadow.

Next, add the dimension of sound: blackbirds cawing as they fly overhead, or waves washing up on shore. Perhaps you can hear a faint melody, a long-forgotten tune. . . .

Now, explore the tactile qualities of this place. Become aware of the temperature, whether it's warmth on your skin or a pleasant cool breeze. If you're lying on the grass, notice the tickling sensation as the blades brush your ear when you turn your head. And remember the unique

smells associated with this time and place. Fresh mown grass, bread just out of the oven, or honeysuckle on the vine . . .

Finally, pay attention to the emotional "feel" of this place. Become aware of ripples of calmness, the reassuring feeling of safety and security. A sense of peace and tranquility pervades the entire scene.

When you have finished creating this peaceful scene, stop for a minute and savor the experience. Just drink it in, memorizing all the components. Let all the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings sink into your awareness. Now anchor the scene with a *key word* like "Catskills" or "Mariposa."

Open your eyes and look around. Notice where you are in the real world. Now go back to the relaxation image. Use your key word. Allow yourself to become fully immersed in the scene. See it, hear it, smell it, feel it. Notice the accompanying sense of security, peace, and relaxation. Now come back to the room again.

Use the form on the next page to record your relaxation scene. Put in as much detail as possible.

In order to help you achieve the transition from the here and now to your relaxation scene as quickly as possible, it's sometimes useful to imagine a *Magic Door*. Science fiction fans will be familiar with this concept as "teleportation," in which you are literally transported from one place to another, instantaneously. Face the nearest blank wall and picture a door with a brass knob and a brass plaque. The plaque has your key word inscribed on it. When you turn the knob and open the door, you will find, to your surprise, that your relaxation scene is already fully prepared on the other side. All you have to do is cross the threshold and there you are, safe and secure.

With a little bit of practice, you are now ready to use this relaxation scene any time there is tension, or when a situation arises that is potentially disturbing or distressing.

Summary

The two relaxation skills that you've learned in this chapter, combined with what you will learn in the next chapter, can have a major impact on your experience of anger. Progressive relaxation training, if practiced daily, can reduce overall tension. And the relaxation imagery you've created can help you face specific situations that threaten your sense of calm.

Homework

1. Using the Anger Log, continue your daily monitoring of situations that elicit anger, and be sure to note trigger thoughts. As before, all angry reactions greater than 40 (on a 100-point scale of anger arousal) are to be recorded.

2. You may photocopy the progressive relaxation training procedure and your relaxation scene in order to facilitate daily practice. Be sure to practice the relaxation training and the relaxation scene at least five times during the next week. Record all practice in the Relaxation Log.

PERSONAL RELAXATION SCENE—Worksheet

Describe time and place (where and when):

Visual components (everything that you can see):

Auditory components (everything that you hear):

Tactile components (things that you touch or feel on your skin):

Olfactory components (what you smell):

Emotional components (feelings like safety or calmness):

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

Relaxation Log

Date	Progressive Relaxation Training	Relaxation Scene

INSTRUCTIONS: Put a check mark under the relaxation exercises completed on each date.

CHAPTER 5

ADVANCED RELAXATION SKILLS

Before we move on to the next set of relaxation techniques, it's useful to review the progress that you've made so far. By now you should be able to reliably relax, using the key words to follow the memorized sequence of the progressive relaxation technique. You should also be able to produce your relaxation image quickly, and in substantial detail, using all your senses. If you don't feel completely sure of yourself, practice a few more times. Then you can begin using this chapter with a sense of confidence and mastery.

At this point you may have questions about just how useful relaxation really is, especially when you find yourself in the middle of a fight with your spouse. The answer is that if you do the relaxation exercises every day, as part of your daily routine, you will notice a marked reduction in your overall tension. You'll also be less irritable. That's because relaxation has become an automatic part of your life. But this isn't enough. You need some more tools to help you relax during a period of actual upset, and that's just what this chapter is all about.

Breathing

A proper breathing technique is the next step on the relaxation agenda. Even though we've been breathing all our lives, most of us have forgotten how to breathe properly. For a quick refresher course, go find the nearest baby. Notice her little tummy rise and fall with each breath. This is called diaphragmatic, or "deep," breathing.

You can start by putting one hand on your chest and the other over your abdomen, just above the belt line. Now take a deep breath and push it all the way down into your belly. It helps to imagine filling a canteen with water. The canteen fills from the bottom up, just like the air in your belly. As you breathe in, the hand over your abdomen will rise, while the hand on your chest hardly moves at all. Focus all your attention on your belly, and send your breath down, down, down to fill your belly. Allow your breath to slightly stretch and relax your abdomen. As you take each breath, noticing your belly rise and fall, you experience a sense of calm.

By doing this exercise, you are automatically sending a message to your brain that all is well. Just like a peacefully sleeping baby.

If you're having trouble pushing the air into your belly, it might be helpful to press down on your abdomen with both hands or place a moderately heavy telephone book on your abdomen. Both of these methods will not only increase your awareness, but will also force you to use your abdominal muscles.

Exercise: Deep Breathing during Stress

In order to practice *deep breathing* during stressful situations, use the outline provided on the next page. For this practice exercise, you'll need to prepare two scenes where stress can lead to a moderate anger response (but not a nuclear meltdown). Create one scene using your work environment and one scene using your home environment. Break down each situation into at least three segments. At the end of each segment is a cue to remind you to take a "deep breath." Now practice your deep breathing technique by visualizing the scenes, one segment at a time, taking a deep diaphragmatic breath at the end of each segment. Notice how the deep breath affects your tension level while you're imagining the scene.

Practice your first moderate stress scene two or three times. When you move on to the second scene, visualize it once without taking your deep breaths. Really get into it; try to make it as real as possible. Notice your stress level when you're finished. Visualize the scene at least two more times, but now taking a deep breath as you finish each segment. Chances are, you'll see that your stress level goes down when you include deep breaths during the scene.

To give you an idea of how to structure your stressful scenes on the worksheet, we've included an example worksheet with two scenes created by a forty-three-year-old insurance adjuster.

When she did this exercise, she experimented with different strategies. First she went through each scene and just thought about how it made her feel. Then she went through each scene again and did some deep breathing, as recommended. She was amazed to find how much her tension level actually went down at the end of the exercise.

Exercise: Relaxation without Tension

Up to now you've practiced the progressive relaxation technique (PRT) by increasing tension, but now it's time to eliminate that tension as well, using a technique called *relaxation without tension*. Once again, go through the PRT sequence. But this time, as you scan each muscle group, simply *notice* any tension in that part of your body, take a deep breath, and as you exhale, *relax away* and let go of all that tension.

- Start at the bottom just as before, and point your toes, then gently reverse, toes to head. Notice any tension, take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax away the tension.
- Now focus on your buttocks. Again, just notice tension (if you find any), then take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax.
- Next, your chest and stomach muscles. Notice, breath, exhale, relax.
- Arch your back, and, without straining, notice any tension. Then, take a deep breath, and relax away the stress.
- Focusing on your arms and biceps, simply notice any tension you may feel there. Now, take a deep breath, and on the exhale, relax the tension. Just let it go.
- Check out your neck and shoulders. Notice, breathe, exhale, relax away the tension.

DEEP BREATHING DURING STRESS—Worksheet

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, create two scenes that are stressful and would lead to a moderate anger response. Break each scene down into at least three segments. Fill in enough detail to allow you to fully imagine each scene. Be sure to take a deep breath at the end of each segment.

Scene 1:
(work)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

Scene 2:
(home)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

DEEP BREATHING DURING STRESS—Worksheet Example

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, create two scenes that are stressful and would lead to a moderate anger response. Break each scene down into at least three segments. Fill in enough detail to allow you to fully imagine each scene. Be sure to take a deep breath at the end of each segment.

Scene 1: (work)

I'm in the car on my way to work and it's hot. The traffic is slowing down to a crawl.

(deep breath)

Now I'm literally stopped. All the windows are open, but not the hint of a breeze. A car pushes into my lane.

(deep breath)

It's a souped-up station wagon with flames painted on the side. The kid is practically hitting my fender.

(deep breath)

Heavy metal blares from his window. Now he's honking and gesturing to let him in. I won't. He keeps inching his bumper closer to my car. (deep breath)

Scene 2: (home)

My mother calls. High creaky voice. Complains bitterly about life in the same house with my aunt. Suddenly she says she wants to visit. (deep breath)

She has the tickets already—arriving June 4. Right in the middle of finals. I tell her no way. She starts sounding irritated. Talking fast. (deep breath)

She says the tickets aren't refundable. Accuses me of not wanting to see her, and not answering the phone when she calls. I feel hot/perspiring. (deep breath)

She's talking really fast. I interrupt, I say my grades will suffer if she comes. She says I ought to loosen up and enjoy life; and stop bringing everyone down. (deep breath)

- Now turn your attention to your forehead and notice any tension you may find. Move your focus to the rest of your face, and mouth. Notice any tension there, take a deep breath, and relax on the exhale.

Practice this at least five times before going on to the next section, and be sure to keep track by using the Relaxation Log at the end of this chapter.

Cue-Controlled Relaxation

Now it's time to choose your personal *cue word*, a two-syllable word or phrase. This will enable you to enter into a state of deep, *cue-controlled relaxation* each time you repeat it. You don't have to say it out loud. Just saying it under your breath, or even thinking it, will work just fine. Choose something like "relax," "let go," "release," or "okay." You might prefer a color, such as "deep blue," or a feeling, such as "true love." A phrase that evokes a personal memory of peace and contentment often works best.

Keeping your cue word (phrase) in mind, return your attention once again to your deep, diaphragmatic breathing. Now, each time you exhale, say your cue word (phrase) out loud or to yourself. Try to relax your entire body as you exhale, and think (or say) your cue word. Make your whole body feel as relaxed as it was when you had just finished the relaxation without tension exercise. Do this ten times in a row, to set up an automatic response pattern. Write your cue word (phrase) in the space below as a reminder:

_____

Exercise: Cue-Controlled Relaxation during Stress

In order to practice this new skill, go back to the scenes you developed earlier for the deep breathing exercise. You can use the same worksheet as before—just replace the deep breathing prompt with your cue word (phrase). This will help you learn to relax by triggering the cue-controlled relaxation response, using your cue word (phrase).

Be sure to practice relaxation without tension and cue-controlled relaxation daily for the next week to ten days. Note all practice times in the Relaxation Log provided at the end of the chapter.

Combined Relaxation Skills

Once you have learned all of the essential elements of relaxation, it's time to practice them by quickly switching them on and off. For practice, do the following combinations: First, do the relaxation imagery for two minutes, followed by relaxation without tension for five minutes, and finally, cue-controlled relaxation (using deep, diaphragmatic breathing) for two minutes. Next, do the relaxation imagery again, cue-controlled relaxation, relaxation without tension, and a final round of relaxation imagery. All in all, this combined relaxation exercise will probably take no more than fifteen minutes. Practice this combined relaxation exercise at least three times in the next week (in addition to the separate relaxation without tension and cue-controlled relaxation described above). Be sure to note all practice times in the Relaxation Log. You can photocopy the sample provided to make as many sheets as you need.

Coping When You're Stressed

Everything that you've done so far is to prepare you for the "real thing." Inevitably, you'll be faced with a provocative situation in real life that challenges your resolve and threatens to blow your composure. That's why it's so important to be really comfortable with brief stress reduction strategies for anger management. This next exercise will allow you to find out for yourself exactly which strategy is most comfortable and effective for you.

Exercise: What Works for You

For this last exercise, write out another provocative scene on the worksheet provided on the next page. Be generous in your attention to detail. This will allow you to fully visualize and experience the scene so that you can *notice* where tension is concentrated in your body. Be sure to insert breathing and relaxation cues. In this exercise, relaxation without tension should focus only on the most tense part of your body. First, do a run-through of each scene without any relaxation, to determine where in your body most of the tension accumulates. Then, during relaxation without tension, you can focus only on those specific muscle groups. Alternate cue-controlled relaxation and relaxation without tension exercises. See which works best for you.

That's it. You have now learned all the key relaxation skills necessary to help control your anger and make your life less stressful. Progressive relaxation and relaxation imagery should become part of your daily routine, because they lower your overall stress and arousal level. Deep breathing, relaxation without tension, and cue-controlled relaxation can be used any time that you are faced with a provocative situation.

The key to success (How do you get to Carnegie Hall?) is practice, practice, practice. Over time these skills will become automatic, just like riding a bicycle or driving a car.

Homework

1. Continue using your Anger Log to record anger situations greater than 40 on the scale.
2. Use Relaxation Log II to note dates you practiced relaxation imagery, cue-controlled relaxation, and relaxation without tension. Plan to practice all three relaxation skills at least five out of seven days in the next week.

COPING WHEN STRESSED—Worksheet

Instructions: In the spaces provided below fill in the details of a provocative scene which is stressful and would lead to a moderate anger response. Break the scene down into 6 segments. Fill in enough detail to allow you to fully imagine the scene. Alternate deep breathing, relaxation without tension (rwt), or cue-controlled relaxation (using your cue word), at the end of each segment.

Provocative Scene:

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

(deep breath)

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

Relaxation Log II

Date	Relaxation Imagery	Cue-Controlled Relaxation	Relaxation without Tension

INSTRUCTIONS: Put a check mark under the relaxation exercises completed on each date.

CHAPTER 6

TRIGGER THOUGHTS

Imagine that you're in an office where several coworkers like to listen to radio talk shows at their desks. The sound isn't terribly loud, but you find yourself distracted by the constant prattle. It continues all day long. Just visualize the scene for a moment. Now imagine that you're saying to yourself, "How inconsiderate they are, how selfish, how unaware of the needs of others." Imagine yourself getting a bit worked up, thinking that they're doing this to you deliberately because they simply don't give a damn about anybody but themselves. Take a moment to notice what you are feeling.

Now imagine the scene with a little twist. Your coworkers are listening to the same distracting talk shows. This time you say to yourself, "I can't think, I can't concentrate, I'm never going to get my work done. I'm never going to get this in on time. I'm not going to be able to function here. How can I keep my job if I can't do a simple task like this when there's a little noise?" Pause a moment to notice what you're feeling.

Now imagine one last version of this scenario. Same office, same coworkers, same radio noise. On this occasion you think to yourself, "I never fit in anywhere. Things always bother me. They'll be resentful if I ask them to turn off the radio. This is the story of my life—I'm the weird one. I'm so rattle-brained that I can't even think with a little background jabber. I can't handle the slightest stress or problem." Now pause and notice what you feel with the situation framed in this way.

In the first scenario, there's a good chance that you felt a little angry. Thoughts that label others as selfish or inconsiderate, blaming them for your discomfort, tend to trigger angry feelings. The second scenario had very different thoughts. When you perceive the situation as dangerous ("I'm not going to be able to function . . . how can I keep my job?"), your emotional reaction is likely to be anxiety. In the last scene, thoughts focus on self-criticism; the problems are all your fault. Your emotional response is likely to be sadness.

As you learned in chapter 2, trigger thoughts have a major impact on your anger. But anger isn't the only emotion that your thoughts influence. The above visualization suggests that thoughts can create anxiety and sadness as well. In fact, how you frame and interpret your experience has far more influence on your feelings than actual events. Your assumptions and beliefs about reality are more powerful than reality itself.

The suggestion that our own thinking might be responsible for some of our most painful emotions runs contrary to conventional wisdom. Normally, we tend to see events as the cause of

our feelings, and this conception is embedded in our language. "You made me angry." "This makes me sad." "The situation scares me." But in between the event and the emotion lies your prefrontal cortex—the place in your brain where you interpret experience. It's not what actually happens that you react to, but the conclusions you draw and the assumptions you make.

Sensory Input Versus Assumptions

One way to understand the role of trigger thoughts in our emotions is to look at the distinction between sensory input (what eyes, ears, and touch tell us) and the *meanings* we create out of sensory information. In truth, we are entirely cut off from direct experience of reality. What we "see" is an internal computer screen created by our conclusions and evaluations, not a picture of the actual event.

Consider this example. Sensory input tells you a friend is frowning, her eyes are narrowing, and her voice is getting higher. She is saying something about having to rush. Because you are late for a lunch appointment, your evaluation is that she must be angry at you. That's the conclusion on your internal screen, so you begin to react defensively, perhaps even picking a fight. Only later do you learn that she was late too, had rushed to meet you, and was relieved that she hadn't kept you waiting. Here's what's important: The assumptions on your screen had almost nothing to do with reality. You'd taken a frown, narrow eyes, and an ambiguous comment and created a completely distorted picture out of them. We do this all the time. We make assumptions about the motives and feelings of others—often very wrong—and get enraged by them.

Exercise: What's on Her Screen?

The following is a transcript of a woman describing, in a psychotherapy session, a recent anger episode with her invalid mother. Read it and underline every statement that is sensory input only; then put a wavy line under every statement that comes from her screen (assumptions, conclusions, beliefs, and meanings drawn from the situation). Here's the transcript:

"She was looking at me with wide open, 'help me, help me' eyes, like she didn't care that I'd already been over there three times that week. So I said, 'What is it, Mom?' And she just sits there and doesn't say anything. She's really still. Like it's beneath her to speak the obvious, that I was put on this earth to take care of her. And I'm screwing it up. I can tell she's just disgusted with me. Finally she says, 'How about some music,' and puts on this hideous Lawrence Welk record. Which she knows I hate, and only plays when she's annoyed with me. My mother lives in passive-aggressive-ville.

"And she lies. If she says A, assume she means B. While the record is on, she says, 'All I really want is to get along with you, Carol.' But I know that's code for 'What's wrong with you, Carol, that you don't get along with me?' It's disguised criticism. That's the way she works. Then she kisses me and says all the hassling is wearing her out and she's going to take a nap before dinner. And she sort of shuffles off like I've destroyed her or something."

If you've finished doing the underlining, look ahead to see what in the transcript is sensory input, and what comes from Carol's "screen."

Sensory Input

She was looking at me with wide open eyes, so I said, "What is it, Mom?" And she just sits there and doesn't say anything. She's really still. Finally she says, "How about some music?" and puts on this Lawrence Welk record. While the record is on she says, "All I really want is to get along with you, Carol." Then she kisses me and says all the hassling is wearing her out and she's going to take a nap before dinner. She sort of shuffles off.

What's on Carol's Screen?

(She was looking at me with) "help me, help me" eyes. Like she didn't care I'd already been over there three times that week . . . (She's really still) like it's beneath her to speak the obvious, that I was put on this earth to take care of her. And I'm screwing it up. I can tell she's just disgusted with me . . . (she puts on) this hideous Lawrence Welk record. Which she knows I hate, and only plays when she's annoyed with me. My mother lives in passive-aggressive-ville.

And she lies. If she says A, assume she means B . . . I know it's code for "What's wrong with you, Carol, that you don't get along with me?" It's disguised criticism. That's the way she works . . . (she shuffles) like I've destroyed her or something.

When you separate the sensory data from the conclusions on the screen, it seems like two almost totally different experiences. In particular, the assumption, "She's just disgusted with me," appears very disconnected from what was actually said and done. In our normal thinking, sensory input and screen conclusions get folded together. The belief, "She's disgusted with me," seems every bit as real as what we actually see and hear. The trouble is that distorted conclusions on our screen often trigger big anger reactions, and we have no idea how far the assumptions on our screen are from reality.

To help distinguish sensory input from screen conclusions, you'll use a slightly modified anger log during the next week. It can be found at the end of the chapter, and it's labeled Anger Log II. It's very important, as you work toward improved anger control, to separate your thoughts (the screen) from the objective facts of a situation. Exaggeration and negative labeling are major sources of anger, and using Anger Log II will ultimately help you do less of both.

Recognizing Trigger Thoughts

You can always tell an anger-triggering thought by how it frames reality. Here are the basic components of most trigger thoughts:

1. The perception that you've been harmed and victimized.
2. The belief that the provoking person harmed you deliberately.
3. The belief that the provoking person was wrong and bad to harm you, and should have behaved differently.

Let's examine some typical trigger thoughts and see how these three elements can be separated out:

1. "Why do I have to come home from work exhausted and shop and clean and cook and get zero help?"
   Harm: Overwork, exhaustion
   Done Deliberately: Implication that the provoking person chooses not to help, thus contributing to the exhaustion.
   And Wrong: Implication that giving zero help is unjust and unfair.

2. "It's a stupid way to operate a car, and I've said it a hundred times—you don't keep riding the brakes because it wears them out."
   Harm: Cost of a brake job; not being listened to.
   Done Deliberately: Implication that if the provoking person thought a little more, or made a reasonable effort, he or she could remember to use the brakes properly.
   And Wrong: Implies that riding the brakes is poor driving technique; and not heeding appropriate warnings is either lazy or careless.

3. "She's doing this to upset me (child jumping on the sofa following an angry exchange regarding staying at the table until breakfast is eaten)."
   Harm: Noise, dirt on sofa, not being listened to.
   Done Deliberately: Implies the child is choosing obnoxious behavior out of a need for revenge.
   And Wrong: Implies child is being manipulative and disobedient.
   Now you try to identify the three elements of trigger thoughts for these next examples.
4. "How could he tell them about losing my job before I did? It's like he's trying to humiliate me."
   Harm:
   Done Deliberately:
   And Wrong:
5. "She doesn't care if the toilet flushes, just as long as I pay the rent. She's all about the money and doesn't give a damn about fixing anything."
   Harm:
   Done Deliberately:
   And Wrong:

Answer Key for Examples 4 and 5

4. *Harm:* Humiliated; *Done Deliberately:* The provoking person chose to reveal confidential information; *And Wrong:* Implies that it's wrong to embarrass someone.
5. *Harm:* Toilet doesn't work; *Done Deliberately:* Landlord chooses to save money and ignore problem; *And Wrong:* Unfair to renters not to maintain property.

Exercise: Dissecting Your Trigger Thoughts

Take four trigger thoughts from last week's Anger Log and identify the key elements.

Trigger Thought 1

Harm:

Done Deliberately:

And Wrong:

Trigger Thought 2

Harm:

Done Deliberately:

And Wrong:

Trigger Thought 3

Harm:

Done Deliberately:

And Wrong:

Trigger Thought 4

Harm:

Done Deliberately:

And Wrong:

Trigger Thoughts Make You Feel Helpless

All trigger thoughts assert that you've been harmed, deliberately and wrongly. But there's one more implication: Not only did the provoking person cause your pain, but they ought to change so the pain can stop. They are both responsible for the harm *and* required to fix it.

The problem with this thinking is that it leaves you feeling very helpless. The pain you experience is out of your control. Someone did it to you, and you won't feel better until they see the light and change their behavior. But, as you already know, *people rarely change*. They keep behaving in habitual ways. They do what's rewarding to them, what makes them feel good. Your anger may distress them briefly, but usually they quickly return to their old patterns. The whole time you're angry, waiting for them to change, you remain stuck. You keep hurting, and the problem feels beyond your control.

This feeling of angry helplessness starts a vicious cycle: You're hurt, the provoking person should fix it but doesn't, and you feel stuck and unable to escape the pain. The feeling of helplessness makes you feel even worse, even more angry, even more frustrated that the provoking person won't change.

Breaking the cycle requires that you take responsibility for changing what's painful, and not wait for the other person to do it. For example, imagine that you have a friend who's chronically late for lunch dates. Over and over you find yourself fuming in a restaurant. Of course, you can lambaste your friend each time you find yourself stuck waiting; you can complain about the thoughtlessness and disregard for your time. However, if you take responsibility for your own pain, you might:

- always remember to bring a book and schedule extra time, or
- never meet in a restaurant, or

- always include others so you'll have someone to talk to while you wait, or
- pick your friend up at home.

Instead of being helpless and angry, you take charge of the situation. Here's another example. Your partner never cleans up after himself. Clothes are on the floor, dishes and cups are left on the coffee table, the bathroom sink always has toothpaste residue. You can stay caught in the anger-helplessness-anger cycle, or you can:

- hire a weekly house cleaner at his expense;
- if there are two bathrooms, give him exclusive use of one;
- put the stuff he drops around the house on top of his desk or in a box;
- leave the dishes on his side of the bed;
- delay putting on the video till he's finished his cleanup tasks for the night;
- move out.

Think back for a moment to the situation described at the beginning of the chapter—feeling distracted by radio talk shows that coworkers listen to all day in the office. If the protagonist in the scene took responsibility for his or her own discomfort, here's how the situation might be reframed. "This is no big deal. They're having a good time. They don't know they're bugging me. I'll find a diplomatic way to get them to turn the radios down, or I'll get some headphones and listen to relaxing music." When you take responsibility, both anger and helplessness melt away. You're suddenly free to solve the problem. Instead of always asking the question, "Who's responsible for my pain?," you ask instead, "What can I do about it?"

Here are three coping mantras that can help you stay focused on taking responsibility:

1. I am responsible for what happens between us.
2. No point in blaming. I'll try a new strategy for taking care of myself.
3. What can I do about this?

Exercise: Taking Control

Review your Anger Log for the past week and complete this exercise for each provocative situation:

TAKING CONTROL—Worksheet

Provocative Situation	What I Expect from the Other Person	How I Can Take Responsibility and Control

Here's an example of how a thirty-year-old programmer responded to this exercise:

Provocative Situation	What I Expect from the Other Person	How I Can Take Responsibility and Control
1. My mother calls and asks for help paying my sister's nursing school tuition.	*She ought to understand my financial situation and not embarrass me by asking for money. My sister should get a loan.*	*Tell her I can't help but don't reveal how truly screwed my finances are. Suggest sister get a loan that the government forgives when you work for the VA.*
2. Boss gives me a new programming assignment before I finish the one I'm working on.	*He should know I'm working as fast as I can, and not load me down so I have to work all night.*	*Tell him I'm unable to start a new assignment till I've met my current deadline.*
3. My mother arranges a birthday party for me and invites a bunch of relatives I hate.	*It's crazy to make a birthday party for someone that they'll hate. She should do something I enjoy—not what she'd enjoy.*	*Tell her to have fun with her relatives, but that's not how I want to spend my birthday. Invite Bill and Carol and Roxanne out to dinner.*
4. Roommate and her boyfriend lay all over the couch, leaving debris from a pizza, and then have a big, loud fight in the living room.	*They should leave space for me to use my own living room, clean up their stuff, and fight where I can't hear it.*	*Tell her to clean up. Then turn up the radio in my room so I don't hear them fighting. Ask her to leave next month.*

Trigger Thought Themes

It's time to once again review the trigger thoughts you've written in your Anger Log. Now the focus should be on identifying key themes and threads that run through your anger triggers. The following is a list of typical themes that occur in trigger thoughts. Put a check by the ones that underlie some of your angry thinking.

- ❑ 1. People ignore your needs.
- ❑ 2. People don't see or understand you.
- ❑ 3. People demand or expect too much.
- ❑ 4. People are inconsiderate or impolite.
- ❑ 5. People take advantage of or use you.
- ❑ 6. People control you.
- ❑ 7. People are selfish.
- ❑ 8. People are stupid and thoughtless.
- ❑ 9. People shame and/or criticize you.
- ❑ 10. People keep you waiting.
- ❑ 11. People are uncaring and/or ungenerous.

- ❑ 12. People are manipulative.
- ❑ 13. People are threatening and coercive.
- ❑ 14. People are mean or cruel.
- ❑ 15. People disrespect you.
- ❑ 16. People are unfair or unjust.
- ❑ 17. People are lazy or don't do their share.
- ❑ 18. You're helpless and stuck and have no choice.
- ❑ 19. People are incompetent.
- ❑ 20. People are irresponsible.
- ❑ 21. People don't help.
- ❑ 22. People don't do the right thing.

Add here any additional themes you discover:

After reviewing your Anger Log, you'll probably find that there are between two and six themes that show up with some frequency. At the root of all of the themes is the notion that people are behaving in ways they shouldn't be, and that you have a right to be angry at them for it.

But what if that weren't true? What if provoking people are doing the only thing they know how to do to take care of themselves and survive? What if they are doing the best they can, given their own needs, fears, pain, and personal history? What if people are behaving based on what they know and don't know, their skills, their physical and emotional limitations, their values, what they find most rewarding, and their available resources? The next exercise explores how most annoying and provoking behavior actually represents the other person's best coping solution, given all of the above.

Exercise: People Are Doing the Best They Can

There's a simple way to prove that this is true. Think back to something you did that really angered another person. Now write down how the following influenced your behavior and choices:

1. Your needs at that moment:

2. Your fears at that moment:

3. Your pain or stress at that moment:

4. Any personal history or experiences that influenced your behavior or choices:

5. What you knew or didn't know at the time:

6. Your skills or lack of skills that influenced your choice at the time:

7. Any physical or emotional limitations that influenced you to act as you did:

8. Personal values or beliefs that influenced your behavior:

9. The prospects for rewards or pleasures that influenced your choice at that moment:

10. Resources that you did or didn't have at that moment that could have influenced your choice:

If you've really worked through this exercise, it should be clear that your behavior seemed the best available choice *at that moment*. You might, with hindsight, do something different. But it appeared to be the best response when you made it.

If you are still uncertain that you make the best choices available to you (even though they anger others), do the exercise with another situation or two. Or do it for a situation where *you* were angry, and try to identify the main influences on the other person's behavior.

A key understanding from this exercise can greatly reduce your anger response: *We are all doing the best we can to take care of ourselves*.

Homework

1. Record all anger experiences over 40 on the scale on Anger Log II. Pay careful attention to the distinction between sensory input (objective data) and the screen (your assumptions).
2. Implement at least one of the "How I can take responsibility and control" items from your Taking Control Worksheet.
3. Record practice dates for relaxation imagery, cue-controlled relaxation, and relaxation without tension on your Relaxation Log. Best results are achieved by practicing at least five out of seven days of the week.

Anger Log II

Provocative Situation Sensory Input (Objective data from what you hear, see, and touch)	The Screen (Your conclusions, interpretations, beliefs, and trigger thoughts)	Anger Rating 0-100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10 Self	Others

Relaxation Log II

Date	Relaxation Imagery	Cue-Controlled Relaxation	Relaxation without Tension

INSTRUCTIONS: Put a check mark under the relaxation exercises completed on each date.

CHAPTER 7

THE ANGER DISTORTIONS

We know that how you think about things determines to a large degree what you experience, and this is particularly true of anger. This chapter will help you to identify the six major categories of thought distortions that are most likely to increase your feelings of anger. For each one, we've included some alternatives: new, helpful coping thoughts. The concept of coping thoughts will be explored fully in the next chapter. For now, however, it's only necessary to understand that coping thoughts are different ways of conceptualizing or reframing a situation in order to help you to better manage your anger.

Blaming

This is the most self-destructive and damaging anger distortion. The mistaken belief that underlies blaming is that other people are doing bad things to you, usually on purpose—and they aren't going to get away with it. It's true that blaming other people can make you feel better sometimes, but it leaves you feeling helpless as well. By blaming others, you are giving up the power to change the situation that is causing you pain. You keep waiting for them to change their behavior. But, of course, they never do. This can cause you to be judgmental and vindictive, lashing out angrily. The other person then responds by pulling back or counterattacking. Now you've got two problems, the original situation and the mess you've made with your angry reaction.

Examples of Blaming

- I could really enjoy this vacation if it weren't for your constant complaining and always finding fault with things.
- If you really cared about me, you would have helped me with the résumé, and then I would have gotten that job.

- You always ask me to give you a ride and then take all day to get dressed, so I'll be late for my meeting.

It's useful to remember that people are mostly doing the best they can. Everyone (including you) tends to behave in ways that will meet their own needs. The people you're blaming are most likely just doing what they can to take care of themselves as best they know how.

When you use a blaming strategy, your entire focus is on trying to change the other person. What's easy to forget is that you're not stuck. You *can* make different choices. Remember that you have some options to change the situation—it doesn't all depend on the other person. The key to dealing with self-defeating blaming is to develop a new coping strategy. This requires you to take responsibility and make your own plan to change the situation, or to figure out a different way of responding to it. Forget the other person—they're not going to do anything different. Therefore, your plan shouldn't require any cooperation whatsoever from the person you blame.

Coping Thoughts to Replace Blaming

- I know that blaming makes me feel helpless, so what can I do to change the situation and make myself feel better?
- I can make a plan to take care of myself in this situation.
- I don't like what he's doing, but I know that he's just trying to take care of himself.
- I'm hurt and disappointed, but I believe that she's doing the best she can.
- I'm not helpless, and I can take care of myself in this situation.
- They're doing what they need to do, so I'll just have to do what I need to do.

Catastrophizing/Magnifying the Situation

This is more than just making a mountain out of a molehill or making things worse than they already are. It's the tendency to take something bad and really run with it, extrapolating a bad situation to the worst possible conclusion. By magnifying events and thinking of them as awful, terrible, or horrendous, you set yourself up to respond in an angry or hostile way. In effect, you behave as though your distorted and exaggerated view of the situation were actual fact.

Examples of Catastrophizing/Magnifying:

- Because of him, my presentation is totally screwed up, and I'm going to lose my job.
- Her behavior is so disgusting that our social life is becoming a complete nightmare.
- This is the worst thing imaginable. It's all over for me now. I'll never be able to show my face around here again.
- Complete disaster! Total betrayal! How could he do something like that?

Luckily, there are a few things that you can do to control the tendency to magnify a bad situation. First, make a realistic assessment of just how bad things are. Sure, things are bad, a hassle, messed up, and definitely not the way you would like them to be. Ask yourself, "How bad is it?" Then ask yourself, "How bad is it *really*?" Make every effort to answer the second question honestly and realistically. Second, be very accurate and precise in the language you use

to describe the bad situation. The restaurant bill isn't "exorbitant and outrageous," it's just a lot more than you expected. And the service wasn't a total embarrassment, the waiter was just over worked and didn't bring your soup as quickly as you have would liked.

Third, look at the whole picture, not just the annoying piece. Every situation or relationship has its positive and negative aspects. Your girlfriend may never be ready on time when you pick her up for a date. On the other hand, she's really supportive and accepting. By focusing on the positive aspects, you can neutralize your anger.

Coping Thoughts to Replace Catastrophizing

- Yeah, this is frustrating, but it's not the end of the world.
- This is really no big deal. I don't like what's going on, but it will be history next week.
- I'll get through this okay if I just hang loose.
- Wow, this situation is really messed up, but I'll do the best I can and make the most of it.
- It's only a setback. It's not worth getting all bent out of shape about it.

Inflammatory Global Labeling

This anger distortion involves making sweeping, often inflammatory, negative judgments about people whose behavior you don't like. However, instead of focusing on the behavior, the label tends to paint the person as being totally wrong, bad, and worthless. This is accomplished by one-word epithets like "loser," "asshole," "jerk," "retard," "bitch," "bastard," or "schmuck." Global labels tend to fuel your anger by turning the person whose behavior you don't like into a worthless object. And, of course the labels are always false and misleading because they reduce the whole person to a single characteristic.

Examples of Inflammatory Global Labeling

- My girlfriend is a total bitch.
- That driver who just cut me off is a complete asshole.
- What a jerk. He doesn't know anything.
- That bastard deserves to be drawn and quartered for what he did to me.
- Look at that wimpy tennis serve—he's a real loser.

The best way to combat a tendency toward global labeling is to be specific. Focus on the annoying behavior and describe it with precision. What happened? When did it happen? How often? How did it affect you or others? Notice that this does not involve making judgments about the other person or making derogatory comments about his/her personality or parentage.

Coping Thoughts to Replace Inflammatory Global Labeling

- Why am I swearing? I feel frustrated, and things aren't going the way I would like. But I can cope with the situation.

- It's nothing more than a problem. I don't have to make her the wicked witch.
- What is really bothering me? Stick to the facts.
- He's not a jerk, just someone who wasn't properly trained to do his job.

Misattributions

This is all about jumping to conclusions and mindreading. When you find yourself feeling hurt or annoyed by other people's behavior, the simplest thing is to imagine that they did it on purpose. Rather than thinking about all the other reasons for why things might have happened as they did, you assume that you know the person's "real" motives. You focus on a single explanation. They were deliberately trying to be mean to you and cause you upset.

It's easy to guess at other people's motives. But if you've ever taken the trouble to check out your assumptions, you've no doubt discovered how often you were partly or completely mistaken. Sometimes misattributions can cause real problems, such as when you angrily act on your mistaken assumptions, only to find out later that the true situation was entirely different from what you imagined.

Examples of Misattributions

- He acted like he just wanted to correct my grammar, but he was really trying to make me look stupid.
- I know she was just doing that to embarrass me in front of everyone.
- What a dumb assignment. He's really out to get me.
- The only reason she's late is just to piss me off.

The best way to avoid misattributions is to pay attention and catch yourself making the assumptions. Then, if possible, check it out with the person directly or gather some relevant facts. If you're reluctant to directly check out your assumptions, at least keep an open mind to other possibilities. Consider asking someone you trust what they make of a certain situation, to get another point of view.

Sometimes your interpretations of other people's behavior might actually be correct. However, there are usually many other reasons or explanations for people's actions—things that might surprise you. Your anger may be way out of line or disproportionate to the situation. A good way to work on misattribution is to get into the habit of developing alternative explanations for other people's behavior. Really brainstorm: Try to think of as many different scenarios as you can, and think of your original assumption as just one of many possible explanations of how other people act.

Coping Thoughts to Replace Misattributions

- That's one possibility, but there are probably other reasons for her behavior.
- Stop trying to second-guess other people's motives.
- Getting angry won't help me figure out what's really going on. I need more facts.
- My assumption may not be accurate—I'd better check it out.

Overgeneralization

Any problem can be made to look bigger or more important by using words like "never," "always," "nobody," "everybody," etc. This is a way of making an occasional occurrence feel like an intolerable ongoing event. By exaggerating, you go way beyond the truth of the situation and set yourself up for an angry response.

Examples of Overgeneralizing

- She's always doing things like that to make me look bad.
- Nobody seems to know what they're doing around here.
- You're never ready on time, so we're always late for everything.
- Everybody is always asking me to do them a favor.

The best antidote for overgeneralization is to make a conscious effort to look for exceptions. Realizing that people act in a variety of ways makes their behavior less upsetting. Ideally, you want to avoid using generalizing terms as much as possible, so it helps to use accurate and specific descriptions of the situation. For example, "This is the second time you're late this week," instead of, "you're never on time."

Coping Thoughts to Replace Overgeneralization

- No need to get upset. Just focus on the facts and I'll get through this okay.
- I want to be accurate. How often has this really happened?
- Generalizing always makes things worse. Just relax and things will calm down.
- This doesn't *always* happen this way. There are lots of exceptions.

There is a special case of overgeneralization that is worth mentioning. It's when you think in terms of black and white only, with no grays in the middle. Everything falls into one of two polar opposites: things are 100 percent right or wrong, good or bad. People either love you or hate you, with no room for anything in between. This kind of dichotomous thinking often leads to anger when people behave in less than perfect ways. Since they're not entirely right, they must be all wrong. Or, since they're not acting friendly toward you, they must be your sworn enemy.

One way of dealing with polarized thinking is to get into the habit of using qualifying adjectives and adverbs such as "a little," "a lot," or "somewhat." This will serve to reintroduce shades of gray into a black-or-white world. Another strategy is to try to see people as the complex, confusing, and often contradictory beings that they really are. By looking closely at a person you despise you may be surprised to find aspects of their personality that you like, and other aspects about which you feel at least neutral.

Demanding/Commanding

This anger distortion is best exemplified by turning your personal preferences into the equivalent of the Ten Commandments. These thoughts often involve words like "should," "got to," "have to," or "ought to." Having a well-developed sense of values is a healthy thing. However, when these values are raised to the level of moral dictates, problems with anger can occur.

Specifically, anger can often be triggered when you judge others by a set of commandments about how people should or shouldn't behave. A typical theme involves entitlement, as in, "Bad things shouldn't happen to me." Another common theme involves perfectionism, as in, "That's not the correct way to do it. You should do it the right way." Fairness is another important theme, as in, "That's not fair. It isn't right when things aren't equal."

Examples of Demanding/Commanding

- They shouldn't have done that—it was absolutely wrong.
- He isn't being fair. He should listen to me once in a while.
- She ought to have known better. That was bound to hurt my feelings.
- This is the way it's got to be. Any other way is just plain stupid.

The biggest problem with a demanding/commanding strategy is that other people rarely do what you think they should. They're too busy taking care of themselves, attending to their own wants and needs. Just because you want something or believe in something doesn't mean that others have to agree with you. This may be hard to stomach, but in fact, there's absolutely no reason why things "should" be the way that you want.

The best way to cope with "shoulds" is to reframe them as things you want or would like. These are just personal preferences. When things don't go the way you would prefer, or you don't get what you want, it's reasonable to feel frustrated and disappointed. But putting it off on someone else's moral failings is a sure road to righteous anger. You're better off sticking with desire and disappointment over shoulds and moral weakness.

Coping Thoughts to Replace Demanding/Commanding

- This is disappointing. I'd rather things were different, but I'll be all right.
- So what if I don't get what I want. It's not the end of the world, and not a reason to blow up.
- This shouldn't be happening to me. I don't like what they're doing, but I live with it.
- There's no reason why she should do it my way, other than that's the way I want it. She's got her own needs to worry about.

Now it's time to practice recognizing and dealing with anger distortions as they occur in your everyday life.

Exercise: Identifying Distortions

Using the worksheet on the next page, fill in examples from your own life of situations where you responded with each anger distortion discussed above. Focus on your thoughts in these situations, because anger distortions grow from how you think about things—your assumptions and conclusions. For example, suppose your brother brings an uninvited guest to your Thanksgiving dinner. Your thoughts are, "He's destroying our evening, he's ruined the family feeling." This is an example of catastrophizing/magnifying and would be written into the appropriate place on the worksheet.

A complete, filled-out example follows the worksheet to help you with the exercise.

IDENTIFYING DISTORTIONS—Worksheet

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, fill in the details of anger-provoking situations in your everyday life, along with the thoughts that exemplify each anger distortion listed:

1. Blaming:

2. Catastrophizing/magnifying:

3. Inflammatory/global labeling:

4. Misattributions:

5. Overgeneralization:

6. Demanding/commanding:

IDENTIFYING DISTORTIONS—Example

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, fill in the details of anger-provoking situations in your everyday life, along with the thoughts that exemplify each anger distortion listed:

1. Blaming:

My visitation day at the park is being ruined by my kids, who keep fighting with each other and are demanding candy and popcorn. "They're always bothering me asking for stuff, so I can't enjoy the day." "If they would just stop all that bickering we could have fun."

2. Catastrophizing/magnifying:

My mother asks for help to pay a dental bill. "She's going to suck me dry." "She's going to end up totally helpless and I'll have to take care of everything."

3. Inflammatory/global labeling:

Tim is late picking me up for a date , again. "What a complete jerk. He doesn't even know how to be on time." "He's such a loser. What am I doing with him anyway?"

4. Misattributions:

Tim is still late for the date. "The only reason that he's late is because he doesn't care about me." "I'll bet he's doing this just to annoy me."

5. Overgeneralization:

Waiting for my friend Mary to get ready so I can drive her to our office party . "She's never ready on time, so we're always late." "She always has some stupid excuse. Everybody we know realizes what a flake she is."

6. Demanding/commanding:

Not happy with the way that Tim did the dishes. "That was absolutely wrong. He should have dried the wine glasses by hand." "Do it right or forget it; I'll do the damn dishes myself."

Exercise: Correcting Distortions

Using the worksheet on the next page, name the countermeasures that you would use to combat the anger distortions that you identified in the previous exercise. Refer back to the description of each distortion to see which countermeasure might work best for you. For example, countermeasures for overgeneralizing involve: (1) looking for exceptions, (2) avoiding generalizing terms, and (3) using accurate and specific descriptions. For the anger example where you had overgeneralized, you'd choose one of these countermeasures to correct the distorted thinking.

A complete, filled-out example follows the worksheet to help you with the exercise.

Doing the exercises to identify anger distortions and name appropriate countermeasures to correct them is the first step. Next, we want you to use this information as a guide to actually revise your distorted thinking in real-life situations.

Homework

1. Continue to record anger experiences over 40 on the scale on Anger Log II. As you write down trigger thoughts in the "Screen" column, also note any anger distortions that you recognize.
2. Implement at least one more of the "How can I take responsibility and control" items form the previous chapter.
3. Using the Relaxation Log, record practice dates for relaxation imagery, cue-controlled relaxation, and relaxation without tension.

CORRECTING DISTORTIONS—Worksheet

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, name the countermeasures that you would employ for the anger distortions that you listed on the previous worksheet, then rewrite each distortion.

1. Blaming:

2. Catastrophizing/magnifying:

3. Inflammatory/global labeling:

4. Misattributions:

5. Overgeneralization:

6. Demanding/commanding:

CORRECTING DISTORTIONS—Example

Instructions: In the spaces provided below, name the countermeasures that you would employ for the anger distortions that you listed on the previous worksheet, then rewrite each distortion.

1. Blaming:
My day at the park. . . . Countermeasures include: (1) understand that children are doing the best they can and (2) develop a new coping strategy. New thoughts: "They're just kids, probably wanting my attention. Let's all have popcorn and enjoy ourselves."

2. Catastrophizing/magnifying:
Mother needs help with dental bill. . . . Countermeasures include: (1) making a realistic assessment and (2) looking at the whole picture. New thoughts: "It's just one bill, and only because she doesn't have dental coverage." "The big picture is that she has Medicare and a pension—she has her own resources."

3. Inflammatory/global labeling:
Tim is late for date. . . . Countermeasures include: (1) focus on the behavior and (2) avoid making derogatory judgments. New thoughts: " He's 45 minutes late. I don't like waiting, but I can handle it." "I'm not going to put him down when I don't know what happened."

4. Misattributions:
Tim is still late. . . . Countermeasures include: (1) avoid assumptions and (2) develop alternate explanations. New thoughts: "I'm not going to assume anything." "He may have had car trouble or got stuck at the office."

5. Overgeneralization:
Waiting for Mary. . . . Countermeasures include: (1) looking for exceptions and (2) accurate and specific descriptions. New thoughts: "She's punctual maybe half the time." "She drove me to that medical test I had at the hospital—on time."

6. Demanding/commanding:
Not happy with how Tim did dishes. . . . Countermeasure: (1) reframe as personal preference. New thoughts: "I wish that he had dried the wine glasses by hand, but it's not the end of the world—I can live with it."

Anger Log

Pain/Stress	Provocative Situation	Trigger Thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Behavior	Outcomes -10 to +10	
					Self	Others

Relaxation Log II

Date	Relaxation Imagery	Cue-Controlled Relaxation	Relaxation without Tension

INSTRUCTIONS: Put a check mark under the relaxation exercises completed on each date.

CHAPTER 12

PROBLEM-SOLVING COMMUNICATION

This chapter will help you to reduce anger experiences by focusing on improving two vital skills: problem solving and communication. A useful place to begin is by examining three different coping styles: passive, aggressive, and assertive.

Coping Styles

The *passive* coping style is characterized by a desire to avoid offending people at all costs. It simply feels too scary to push for what you want if it conflicts in any way with the needs of others. Often this means saying nothing—certainly nothing about your own wants and needs. At best, you express your wants indirectly. When you need to set limits, you tend to do it by avoiding the situation or just by dragging your feet. The advantage of this coping strategy is that people will rarely be angry at you, since on the surface you appear good, sweet, and compliant. The downside, of course, is that people don't see you for who you really are. You're like the invisible man. You never get what *you* want, and often feel overwhelmed by the demands of others. What you *do* get is the opportunity to carry a load of resentment because no one seems to see or acknowledge what's important to you.

The *aggressive* coping style is characterized by pushing people around, loudly demanding that you get things your way, and punishing people who don't give you what you want. The advantage of this coping strategy is that aggressive people often *do* get what they want. This might mean having things go their way regarding chores at home, or getting the last fresh rye bread at the bakery.

There is, however, a downside as well to the aggressive coping style. The people you try to intimidate and push around will find some way to retaliate, either directly through confrontation or indirectly through avoidance. Confrontation leads to escalation and the dangers of a knock-down-drag-out fight (either physically or psychologically). Avoidance leads to a feeling of isolation and loneliness. And, the aggressive person can never be quite sure if even those close to him/her are cooperating out of love or fear.

A note about the "passive-aggressive" style: Inside every "long-suffering," passive-coping-style person is a lot of anger. When you're afraid to ask directly for what you want, resentment and pain build up inside. A "nice-guy," passive coping style leaves you feeling stuck and helpless, until the pressure builds to the breaking point. Then, any convenient trigger will serve to precipitate a vicious outburst—often indirect, yet lethal nonetheless.

The *assertive* coping style, which we recommend, is characterized by the belief that everyone has the right to express their own legitimate needs. You *are* allowed to say what you want, express feelings, stand up for your rights, and set appropriate limits. All this can be accomplished without violating the rights of others, who, by the way, also have a right to express their needs.

The assertive style allows you to work toward a settlement without anger. It makes it possible to seek a solution where both parties get something they want. The assertive style allows you to protect yourself without blaming others, and lets you set limits without turning other people off. Being assertive (rather than passive or aggressive) works well in every aspect of interpersonal interaction, whether it be struggles about money, conflicts at work, or intimate issues like sexuality. Clear, direct, and nonattacking communication will usually bring the best results.

In order to clarify these different coping styles, here are several examples of real-life situations.

Mark goes to a convenience store, picks up a six-pack of soda, and pays for it at the counter. As he's leaving the store, mentally reviewing the change he got from his ten-dollar bill, and with one foot out the door, he suddenly realizes that he's a dollar short. What does he do?

If Mark habitually used a passive coping style, he would probably say something to himself like, "Oh well, it's only a dollar. Maybe I made the mistake, and the line at the counter is awfully long." He would leave the store having avoided a potentially unpleasant confrontation. But Mark would carry a residual amount of resentment, wondering if the clerk was really trying to rip him off.

If Mark were the kind of person who used an aggressive coping style, he would respond in a different way. He'd probably whirl around, push his way back to the front of the line, and in a loud voice demand his money. "You don't even know how to make correct change. I'm a dollar short and you better give it to me." Mark would probably get his dollar, but he would also be met with hostility and resentment on future visits to the store.

But Mark is a person who uses an assertive coping style. He returns to the counter and waits until the clerk has finished with the next customer. Then, speaking up briskly, he says to the clerk, "I think that you've made a mistake. The change that you gave me is a dollar short. (Showing the change in his hand) I gave you a ten-dollar bill." If the clerk refuses to make the correction, then Mark would say, "Please let me speak with your manager."

Another example comes from Joan, who has a friend (Sally) in need of a ride. Joan has a car, but her friend does not, and since they're both going to the same meeting, she agrees to give Sally a lift. When Joan arrives, her friend is not ready—she's just getting out of the shower. It's clear that, unless Sally really gets herself in gear, they won't get to the meeting on time.

If Joan were using a passive coping style, she would just stand around encouraging Sally to "hurry up," or try to help her find her shoes. As the time drags on, Joan would feel her stomach tighten, knowing that they would be late for the meeting, and building up resentment that would resurface later.

If Joan habitually used an aggressive coping style, she would probably say to Sally, "I'm getting goddamn sick of waiting. I'm going to the meeting and you can call a cab," slamming the door and leaving her friend in the lurch.

If Joan used an assertive coping style, she'd say, "Look, Sally, I really want to get to the meeting on time. I can wait for five minutes, but if you're not ready by then I'll have to leave. If

you want, I'll call a cab for you before I go." Joan gets to the meeting on time, while giving her friend as much support and help as possible.

Assertive Statements

An assertive message is characterized by the use of the three "F's": facts, feelings, and fair requests.

"Just the *facts*, ma'am," is a familiar phrase from a popular detective drama of the sixties. Joe Friday was right. The first component of an assertive statement is an objective description of what you observe—things you see, hear, or notice. It presents the facts, as you perceive them, without making judgments, trying to place blame, or guessing at the intentions of the other person.

Here are some examples of factual observations that are not tainted by judgments or blame.

- "I notice that the sink is full of the dirty dishes from last night's dinner."
- "I see that the videos that we rented are still on the table near the door, waiting to be returned."
- "It looks like the grass on the front lawn is getting pretty high."

Sometimes it's hard to separate the facts from the feelings, but it's the first step in reducing the anger spiral. When you state the facts, it opens up the topic for discussion, and you'll be more likely to get cooperation from the other person. By contrast, beginning a discussion with an insulting comment like, "Are you too lazy to do the dishes now?" or "Lame brain, you forgot to return the videos and our lawn looks like a jungle," only serves to fuel your own anger. And comments like these are also likely to make the other person defensive and angry as well.

The second component of an assertive statement acknowledges your honest reaction, your personal *feelings*. It lets the other person become aware of how his/her behavior has affected you. It's important to state this in a way that avoids making the other person feel defensive. So you need to steer away from statements that are blaming or guilt slinging.

Here are some examples of statements that acknowledge personal feelings without judging or blaming others.

- "When I come home from work and find dirty dishes in the kitchen sink, I feel angry." ■ "When you spend much of your free time either watching TV or on the Internet, I feel lonely and resentful. I miss you."
- "When we go to a party and you ignore me, paying attention to other men, I feel jealous and abandoned."

The last—and most important—part of the assertive statement is making a *fair request*. This is basically just saying what you want. There are, however, some guidelines that will make this part of the assertive statement more effective. First, make a *specific* request, and see to it that it's reasonably "doable." "I want you to be a millionaire," although specific, and an understandable desire, does not meet the criterion. "I want us to take three weeks off this summer and spend it in the mountains," is more like it.

Another important thing to remember is to make just *one* request at a time. It may be true that you want your wife to cook more French meals, spend less money on antiques, be more supportive of your career aspirations, make the azaleas bloom, and model Victoria's Secret intimate apparel. But if you bring these issues up all at once, she's bound to feel overwhelmed, criticized, and attacked.

Finally, a fair request is characterized by the fact that it seeks a *behavioral change*. It's useless to ask people to change their attitudes, values, or feelings. For example, it's reasonable for you to ask your husband to attend the office Christmas party, and he may agree to go for your sake. But asking him to *want* to go is an exercise in futility.

Now, putting it all together, here are some examples of complete assertive statements.

- "When I drove the car to work this morning I noticed that the gas tank read almost empty. (Facts) I felt annoyed and angry. (Feelings) When you use the car on the weekend, I would like you to make sure that you refill the tank, so I won't be inconvenienced." (Fair request)
- "You spend a lot of time at work, and even bring more work home with you to do on the weekends. (Facts) I feel lonely and miss our intimate times together. (Feelings) I would like to make a date with you for a quiet, romantic dinner this weekend." (Fair request)

Consequences

When you don't get results by using all the elements of assertive communication—facts, feelings, and fair request—it may be time to add a more forceful component. In the absence of willing cooperation, it might be necessary to add *consequences* to the equation.

Some people will be naturally motivated to go along with your assertive statements. They might value your friendship, or seek to maintain your continued goodwill. They might see the fairness in your request, or just want to make you happy. But when people aren't motivated to meet your needs, you'll have to up the ante by providing some form of reinforcement. Using positive reinforcement (rewards) is best, simply because it usually works better than punishment, which tends to create resistance and resentment.

Unfortunately, there are times when positive rewards just won't do the job. No amount of praise or promised goodies will get the results you want. One solution is to institute consequences in the form of sanctions. Simply put, this means the other person will have to pay a price for not going along with what you want. The purpose of applying sanctions is to motivate the other person to cooperate with you or to respect your boundaries. Used judiciously, appropriate sanctions can help you get your needs met without anger.

Here are four rules for using consequences most effectively.

1. **Consequences should be specific**. Be precise about exactly what behavior will trigger the consequence. And be precise about what will happen next. Vague threats like, "If you don't stop bugging me, you'll be sorry," don't give the other person enough information and are unlikely to get results. A better formulation is, "If you don't stop calling me several times a day, I'll use my answering machine to screen calls, and won't talk to you for twenty-four hours after your last call."

2. **Consequences should be reasonable**. Setting reasonable consequences helps you feel in control, and it allows other people to make sensible decisions. Avoid setting consequences that involve threats of violence or public humiliation. For example, from a mother to her teenage son: "If you don't watch your mouth I'm going to slap you silly." These types of unreasonable sanctions will tend to make people angry, and they'll be less likely to want to cooperate with you. A better reformulation of the mother-son example is, "If you speak to me again in a disrespectful manner, there'll be no allowance this week."

3. **Consequences should be consistent**. If you've said that you're going to do something, like not respond to pestering phone calls, then you have to do it. And do it *every time* the situation comes

up. If you don't follow through, the other person will learn not to take you seriously. Being consistent will teach the other person to respect you and your limits, both now and in the future.

4. **Be sure that you can live with the results yourself**. That means, don't bite off your nose to spite your face. It doesn't make sense to try to get rid of the ant problem by dynamiting your house. The consequences you set should be problematic for the other person, not for you. Bob's divorced mother, Marion, told him that she would not fly out for his college graduation unless he shaved off what she called "that silly beard that makes you look like a bum." He decided that it was time for him to take a stand for independence. Besides, his girlfriend really thought the beard was cute. True to her word, Marion boycotted the graduation, leaving her ex-husband as the sole family representative. Dad had a great time with his son—it turned out to be a real bonding experience. To this day, Marion still regrets missing an important milestone in her son's life, and the rift it created in their relationship.

A cautionary word about making dramatic ultimatums: Be careful about using consequences like threatening to file for a divorce or kill yourself. Although these statements may seem appropriate in the heat of battle, they usually end up hurting you more, and they rarely get you what you want anyway.

Exercise: Practicing Assertiveness

On the Assertive Scripts Worksheets provided, write out an assertive script for two problematic situations in your life. Be sure to include all the elements of facts, feelings, and fair request, and a consequence that meets all the criteria mentioned above. Finally, we want you to make a commitment to change by setting a date and time for implementation.

Negotiation

Another way to minimize angry interactions is to learn how to *negotiate* when there is a conflict of interest or needs. This isn't easy, because it requires that you listen and try to understand the other person's point of view. It's much easier to simply picture the other person as wrong or stupid. Then, all you have to do is convince them, by any means possible, that you're right and they should do it your way.

Negotiation requires that you start with the premise that the other person's needs are as important to him/her as yours are to you. Trying to angrily bully your way into getting what you want will usually not get others to change their point of view. When you have a conflict of needs, negotiation allows you to find a middle ground where both of you can get some of what you want.

There are six steps to a successful negotiation:

1. Know what it is that you want. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Sure, you "want to be happy," but what exactly does that mean? You need to be as specific as possible.

"I want us to go to Maine for two weeks this summer."

2. State what you want in behavioral terms. This means saying what, specifically, you want the other person to do or not do.

"I want you to wash the dishes before watching any TV."

"I don't want you to work late at the office."

3. Listen to the other person's point of view. The purpose of this step is to gather information so that you can understand his position, not to argue. Use active listening skills such as asking

ASSERTIVE SCRIPTS—Worksheet 1

In the spaces provided below, begin by sketching out a problematic situation in your life that needs to change. Then, write out in detail an assertive script to make that happen. Be sure to fill in all the elements of facts, feelings, and fair request. Next, add a consequence that is specific, reasonable, and one that you can consistently apply without hurting yourself. Finally, write in a date and time when you plan to implement this plan.

Problematic Situation 1:

Assertive Script

FACTS:

FEELINGS:

FAIR REQUEST:

CONSEQUENCES:

DATE & TIME OF IMPLEMENTATION:

ASSERTIVE SCRIPTS—Worksheet 2

In the spaces provided below, begin by sketching out a problematic situation in your life that needs to change. Then, write out in detail an assertive script to make that happen. Be sure to fill in all the elements of facts, feelings, and fair request. Next, add a consequence that is specific, reasonable, and one that you can consistently apply without hurting yourself. Finally, write in a date and time when you plan to implement this plan.

Problematic Situation 2:

Assertive Script

FACTS:

FEELINGS:

FAIR REQUEST:

CONSEQUENCES:

DATE & TIME OF IMPLEMENTATION:

questions, clarifying, and paraphrasing what you think the other person is trying to say. Understanding a point of view doesn't mean that you have to agree with it. Having gotten this far, you can now take the next step, which is . . .

4. Make a proposal. Your proposal should take into account what the other person needs or wants in this situation. What's in it for him or her to do what you want? This may take some creative thinking and a flexible attitude.

5. Ask for a counterproposal. If the other person doesn't like your proposal, encourage him or her to come up with an alternative. Remember, you're trying to come up with something that you both can live with.

6. Achieve a compromise. This is the heart of the negotiation process. In some situations, you might say something like, "It's really important to me that we do it this way now. What would it take for you to go along this time?" Here are some sample compromise solutions:

- "When the kids are in my house, I'll make the rules for watching TV. When they're at your house, you make the rules."
- "Let's try it my way for week and see if it works. If you don't like it, we'll go back to doing it the old way."
- "When you're driving we'll do it your way, and when I'm driving we'll do it my way." ■

"Let's split the difference."

- "If we do it my way this time, I'll agree to do it your way next time."

Setting Limits

Every day, you are bombarded with requests. Some of them, like going to lunch with a friend, are requests that you are glad to agree to do. Then there are all the others. Incessant calls from telemarketers trying to sell you something. Subtle requests from your boss to volunteer for a new project or put in some unpaid overtime. A call from your sister trying to guilt-trip you into taking care of your invalid father on the East Coast.

The ability to say no is a critical skill. Saying no sends a message to the world that you have your own needs, wishes, and priorities. That you are able to defend yourself against other people's demands. A statement of your own boundaries lets other people know that you're not a pushover. That you're worthy of respect, and that you value your own needs alongside the needs of others.

It is the people who can't set limits who are at risk for experiencing chronic anger. They feel taken advantage of, helpless in the face of the demands others make on their time, space, or money. They can feel like a prisoner in an intimate relationship, giving, giving, giving, all the time. They expend all their energy on people or activities that give them little pleasure or satisfaction, and they end up having little time for those things that could provide some real happiness.

There are three basic steps for setting limits:

1. Acknowledging the other person's needs. First, you may need to get more information about what the other person wants. Feel free to ask specific questions. What exactly is entailed in a request to "help out with the party," "be more intimate," or "advertise the new product"? Once you understand what is being requested, you can rephrase and repeat it back. This assures the other person that you have heard correctly.

2. Stating your own position. This is your reason for setting the limit. It may include your feelings, preferences, or perception of the circumstances. State your position without apologizing, as confidently and assertively as possible. Just describe what is true or right for you, without putting yourself down. "I need to rest this weekend." "I don't like playing golf."

3. Saying no. This is the essence of setting a limit. "No thanks." "I don't want to do that." "I've decided not to go." "It just doesn't feel right for me." "I'm not willing to drive."

Here are some examples of setting limits:

- "I understand that you need help with the party, and you want me to do all the shopping. (Acknowledging) I don't have the time next weekend. I'm working on a voter registration drive. (Your position) So, I won't be able to help you." (Saying no)
- "I'm aware that you feel attracted to me. (Acknowledging) I feel flattered, and enjoy spending time with you—but just as a friend. (Your position) I don't want to have a sexual relationship with you." (Saying no)
- "When you said that you wanted help to advertise the new product, you meant for me to create a full-blown ad campaign, including a color brochure. (Acknowledging) My other deadlines and commitments don't allow me the necessary time to do this project. (Your position) I have to ask you to give this project to someone else." (Saying no)

Exercise: Setting Limits

On the Setting Limits Worksheet provided, we want you to write out two limit-setting scripts, following the model provided above. Focus on *current* problem situations where you need to set a boundary, and commit yourself to implementing these ideas at the next available opportunity.

Saying no and setting limits can be difficult to accomplish at first—especially if you're not used to standing up for yourself. Here are some suggestions that will make it easier to get started:

Don't apologize. When you apologize for setting a limit, it communicates to the other person that you don't feel that you have the right to take care of yourself. Excessive apologies will invite the other person to put more pressure on you or ask for a different favor to "make it up" to them.

Don't put yourself down. Saying things like "I can't help you because . . . I'm too weak . . . clumsy . . . afraid . . ." is not a good way to set a limit. The other person will try to convince you that you *can* do it, leaving you stuck with having to prove that you can't. Saying "I won't" or "I don't want to" is a much better strategy because it leaves the other person less room to argue with you.

Be aware of voice and body language. When you set a limit, look the other person in the eye. If you're on the telephone, speak with a clear, confident voice. You want your tone of voice and body posture to match your assertive statement.

Delay your response. If you're someone who tends to automatically say yes to things, stall for time. You'll probably think more clearly without the pressure of an immediate response. Tell them, "I'll let you know this afternoon," or "I'll have to get back to you on that."

Be specific. If you don't want to say no outright, be clear about exactly what you are and are not willing to do. "I'm willing to review your design for the brochure, but I won't get involved in the production end." "I'm willing to bring a bottle of wine to the party, but I can't make the salad."

SETTING LIMITS—Worksheet

In the spaces provided below, write out two scripts for saying no in a current problematic situation.

Situation 1

Acknowledge:

State your position:

Set limit:

Next implementation opportunity:

Situation 2

Acknowledge:

State your position:

Set limit:

Next implementation opportunity:

Dealing with Criticism

Criticism can be very painful. It can evoke memories from childhood when your behavior was minutely scrutinized for mistakes. Then you were judged and made to feel wrong, bad, guilty, and worthless. Each of these feelings has the potential for triggering anger, which is used to avoid and cover up the painful emotions.

There is a way of hearing criticism that can be beneficial to you. Accept the comment as feedback, separate out what is appropriate and useful, and disregard what is not. Here are the steps you need to take.

First, *stop the attack*. Don't allow yourself to be verbally battered by angry, abusive attacks from others. Even if you are wrong, or feel guilty about the situation, you don't deserve to be kicked around. If the other person continues to attack you, despite your request to stop, you can call for a time-out and walk away.

Whenever Sharon called her mother, Etta, she was inevitably subjected to a scathing critique of her child-rearing skills. Nothing Sharon did seemed to be right, from the way she fed her children to the clothes they wore. Etta not only gave advice freely, she also yelled at her daughter, calling her an incompetent mother. Sharon would leave each telephone call feeling devastated. Eventually, with the help of a therapist, she learned how to handle the situation. Whenever Etta started to yell or call her names, Sharon would say, "Mother, please stop shouting or I'll hang up." If her mother continued, Sharon was instructed to say, "Oh, well. Gotta go now. Bye," and hang up. She would then leave the house so that she couldn't hear the phone ring every ten minutes.

Next, remind yourself that what you're hearing is only *one person's opinion* about a specific aspect of your behavior. The criticism is about something you've done, not about who you are. The report that you submitted may be deemed "worthless" by your supervisor, but that doesn't mean that you are a worthless person, or that all your work in the past has been worthless. Accept the fact that you don't always do your best job, often because of being rushed or not having all the information you need.

Some criticism can be constructive and helpful. Before you fly into a rage or slink away in embarrassment, make sure you know exactly what the critic is trying to tell you. In order to get the most value out of the situation, you will have to *ask for more information.* Although it's uncomfortable to encourage the critic, probing for more information may provide you with the useful feedback you need to improve future performance—or your relationship.

When Jim wrote the report for his company, he included lots of historical analysis and comparisons to other industries. His supervisor, Bob, returned the report to him, saying it was "useless." Jim felt hurt and devastated, but he was also curious. He asked Bob what exactly he would have liked to see in the report. It turns out that what was wanted was a current market analysis, comparison with other companies in the same industry, and projections for the next five years. The report Jim submitted, although good background material, was indeed useless. What Jim learned is that Bob doesn't always communicate his needs well. Next time he will ask more questions and get all the information he needs before writing a report.

Trevor thought that his relationship with MaryLou was going pretty well, despite fights now and then. So he was really surprised and hurt when MaryLou became critical and attacked him, apparently out of the blue. "You're just never there for me. All you care about is yourself and your own needs." Gathering courage, Trevor asked her what she meant. "Remember last year, when you broke your ankle and it was in a cast for six weeks? I was at your house every other day, cleaning up, cooking your food, and waiting on you hand and foot. I've been sick with the flu for more than a week and you just go on with your life, and don't even come by to see how I am." Trevor was indeed "clueless," but now he has some more information. MaryLou

would feel cared for if he paid more attention to her and did some things to help her out when she was down.

There are three techniques that you can use to deflect criticism, prevent escalation, and disarm the critic.

1. **Clouding** is a strategy in which you partially agree with the criticism without accepting it completely. This requires that you listen carefully to the critic and agree with the part of the criticism that you feel is accurate. Other options are to agree in principle, or agree in probability.

For example, the *criticism* might be, "You spend money like it grows on trees. At this rate we'll be penniless in no time." You can *agree in part* by saying, "Yeah, we have been spending more money since we bought those horses." Or you could *agree in principle*, by saying, "I think you're right, it's not a good idea to spend too much money." Lastly, you could choose to *agree in probability* by saying something like, "It's probably true that we're spending quite a bit right now."

2. Making an **assertive preference** is a way of shutting off the critic completely. You use this technique by acknowledging the criticism, but disagreeing with it. There's no need to give a lengthy explanation or rationale for your behavior—you simply state that that's the way you want to do things. This technique assumes an equal power situation and is a very effective way of stopping further discussion without attacking the other person. And you can do it without getting angry.

For example, if the criticism is, "That's a dumb way to deal with your kids coming home after curfew," you can respond with an assertive preference statement by saying, "I hear that you don't agree with how I'm handling this situation, but I prefer to do it this way." If the critic tries to continue by pointing out the dangers of doing it your way, you can respond by saying, "Thanks for your concern, but I'm willing to take that risk."

3. You can make a **content-to-process shift** to prevent a discussion from heating up into a full-blown conflagration, or when you think that underlying feelings are fueling the fire. When you make a content-to-process shift, the focus of the discussion changes from the issue (content) to what's going on inside you or the quality of the interaction (process). It allows you to get to the real or more important issue that lies at the bottom of the conflict.

For example, "I know that you like me to look good in public, but we're always arguing about how much money I spend on clothes. I end up feeling accused and attacked by you. What's going on between us that we're feeling angry all the time?"

Exercise: Dealing with Criticism

Use the worksheet on the next page to prepare some more effective ways to deal with criticism. Begin by writing a description of a recent provocative scene in which you felt criticized and attacked. Then, write out what words or actions you would have employed to stop the attack. Next, write what specific questions you would have asked to learn more about the other person's needs, feelings, or problems. Finally, write down some ways in which you could have used clouding, assertive preference, or content-to-process shift to deflect the attack.

Homework

1. Monitor anger and coping responses on Anger Log III.
2. Use the Creating Coping Thoughts Worksheet to develop better anger management responses following situations where you lapsed into anger.

DEALING WITH CRITICISM—Worksheet

In the space below, write a description of a recent provocative scene in which you felt criticized and attacked. Then, *in retrospect*, fill out the rest of the worksheet with strategies that you could have used to change the outcome.

Provocative scene involving criticism:

If you decided to stop the attack, how could you accomplish it?

Words:

Actions:

If you wanted to learn more about the other person's position, what specific questions would you ask to ascertain the following:

Feelings:

Problems:

What they want:

If you wanted to deflect the attack, how would you use:

Clouding:

Assertive preference:

Content-to-process shift:

Anger Log III

Provocative Situation Sensory Input (Objective data from what you hear, see, and touch)	The Screen Your conclusions, assumptions, interpretations, beliefs, and trigger thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Coping Strategies Breathing, relaxation, coping thoughts, coping behaviors.	Anger Rating 0–100	Outcomes Rating -10 to +10 Self	Others

CREATING COPING THOUGHTS—Worksheet

Complete the following for each significant trigger thought in an anger situation.

1. Trigger thoughts that inflame my anger:
   a.
   b.
   c.
2. Anger distortions that underlie my trigger thoughts:
   a.
   b.
   c.
3. Counterresponse plan for each of my trigger thoughts (e.g., looking for exceptions, alternative explanations, preferences instead of shoulds, etc.). Revised trigger thought based on each counterresponse plan.
   a. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   b. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   c. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

4. Helpful coping thoughts (see General Coping Thoughts List earlier in this chapter):
   a.
   b.
   c.

CREATING COPING THOUGHTS—Worksheet

Complete the following for each significant trigger thought in an anger situation.

1. Trigger thoughts that inflame my anger:
   a.
   b.
   c.
2. Anger distortions that underlie my trigger thoughts:
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   a. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   b. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   c. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

4. Helpful coping thoughts (see General Coping Thoughts List earlier in this chapter):
   a.
   b.
   c.

CHAPTER 13

YOUR PLAN FOR REAL-LIFE COPING

This chapter will be an opportunity to synthesize much of what you've learned so far about anger management. The first step will be an exercise to help you recognize and remember the coping thoughts that have worked best for you.

Best Coping Thoughts

Look back over the three chapters where you used anger inoculation to cope with anger in visualized scenes. Review each Creating Coping Thoughts Worksheet that you filled out and write down on a separate piece of paper the coping thoughts that seemed most effective. Now go back and review the "coping efforts" column from each Anger Log III that you've completed. Add any good coping thoughts that you find in your logs to the list you're compiling.

Now it's time to turn the list you just made into something that can really help you. The Best Coping Thoughts Exercise you're about to complete will organize the random coping thoughts from your list into nine specific coping categories. The categories for best coping thoughts are:

1. Cool thoughts. These are simple reminders to use your relaxation skills.

2. Problem-solving thoughts. This type of coping thought identifies alternative solutions to a problem. Anger is just a signal to start looking for new answers.

3. Escape routes. These thoughts remind you to walk away from something upsetting, to remove yourself from the situation before things escalate.

4. Self-confidence thoughts. These remind you that you have the ability to manage your anger in provocative situations. No matter what happens, you recognize that you have the skills to cope.

5. New explanations. These thoughts help you identify alternative ways of thinking about people's problematic behavior. Why else might they be acting as they do? Instead of assuming that you're a target, these coping thoughts look for more benign interpretations.

6. See the whole picture. This type of coping thought looks for exceptions to overgeneralizations. You try to remember balancing facts or events that help you see the other person in a less negative light.

7. Getting accurate. These are self-reminders that encourage you to stay with the facts of a situation while avoiding any kind of magnifying or exaggerating. Getting accurate can also mean recognizing how a situation is *realistically negative*, but not awful or unbearable.

8. Preferences, not shoulds. This category of coping thoughts changes absolute "should" statements into simple preferences. Instead of focusing on unbendable rules for living, you soften angry expectations into personal wants and desires.

9. People doing their best. These coping thoughts remind you that people are trying to survive their own pain and struggles. They're trying to manage their life circumstances as best they can.

Exercise: Best Coping Thoughts*

This exercise includes the nine categories of coping thoughts just discussed. Under each category, you'll find some examples. Then there's a space for you to fill in coping thoughts of your own (from the list you just compiled) that seem to fit that category.

When you've worked your way through all nine coping thought categories, go back and do another pass. Read each of the example coping thoughts that are included in the exercise. Put a star by any of the example coping thoughts that you think might be helpful for you.

As a final step, focus on the coping thoughts categories where you've written nothing down. Take some time to think about each of these categories and see if you can create some coping thought of your own for them. If you have difficulty, go back and look at the General Coping Thoughts list in chapter 8.

Cool Thoughts

"Just stay cool, getting all pissed off won't help."

"It's just not worth it. Take a few deep breaths and chill out."

"This too shall pass. Others have to deal with this kind of stuff without going crazy mad."

Your coping thoughts:

Problem-Solving Thoughts

"It's not the end of the world, just a problem to be solved."

"It's okay to feel annoyed, but it's just a hassle to be dealt with."

"Develop a plan. So, the first thing I would want to do is . . ."

"Break the frustration down. I can deal better with it that way."

* Adapted from *Overcoming Situational and General Anger* by Jerry Deffenbacher and Matthew McKay.

Your coping thoughts:

Escape Routes

"I can always walk away rather than lose it totally."

"It's okay to take time out. Move away, get your act together, then come back and deal with it."

"Better to walk away than to be a screaming idiot."

"Bottom line, I walk before I hit or do something dumb."

Your coping thoughts:

Self-Confidence Thoughts

"I can handle this—I've done it before."

"I'm hanging in and coping."

"I have what it takes to get through this hassle."

"I'm getting better at this anger management stuff."

Your coping thoughts:

New Explanations

"They're probably just (scared, overwhelmed, not understanding, confused, out of the loop, hurting, etc.)"

"Cut them some slack. I'd hope they'd do the same for me if I were having a bad time." Your coping thoughts:

See the Whole Picture

"Look at the other side."

"There are exceptions. For example . . ."

"Time to look for some of the good for a change."

Your coping thoughts:

Getting Accurate

"Cut the angry crap. Tell it like it is."

"Just the facts."

"Tell it simple and straight."

"I'm frustrated and disappointed. Better stay there and quit while I'm only somewhat behind."

Your coping thoughts:

Preferences, Not Shoulds

"It doesn't have to be my way, I just prefer it."

"What I want and what has to be are two different things."

"This is what I *need*, not a *should*."

"Nobody appointed me God. So give it up. Be human and focus on your wants."

Your coping thoughts:

People Doing Their Best

"They're doing what they know how to do."

"They're coping the best they can, all things considered."

"I don't like how they do it, but they're just trying to survive."

Your coping thoughts:

Best Coping Behaviors

Now it's time to look back again at the "coping efforts" column of Anger Log III. This time, pay attention to how you behave in response to anger provocations. What are you doing or not doing that is different from your old anger response? Do you try to speak in a quieter voice? Do you choose words that are less inflammatory? Do you withdraw at times from a provocative situation rather than explode? Do you find a way to express your needs assertively rather than use blaming attacks? Have you on occasion suggested a solution or a compromise instead of going on the warpath?

While you may find some examples of good coping behaviors in the Anger Log, many of your best coping efforts may be in situations where you never got angry enough to write anything down. Your very success made your coping efforts easy to forget. The exercise that follows is an opportunity to record your best and most successful coping behaviors. In the space provided in the exercise, write examples from your own recent experience of each category of

coping behavior. Don't be surprised if you have no examples that fit some of the categories. No one person is going to use all of these coping strategies.

Exercise: Best Coping Behaviors

1. Expressed needs in nonattacking ways. Examples:

2. Softened inflammatory language. Examples:

3. Lowered my voice. Examples:

4. Suggested an alternative solution or compromise. Examples:

5. Tried to express understanding of the other person's views. Examples:

6. Withdrew from a situation rather than let it escalate. Took time to think things through. Examples:

7. Agreed to disagree and let it go. Examples:

8. Described a problem without blaming the other person. Examples:

9. Tried to listen to the other person to get a better awareness of what they want. Examples:

10. Tried to change the subject so things wouldn't escalate. Examples:

11. Other coping behaviors:

Once filled in, this exercise provides you a good list of coping behaviors that work for you. You can use it as a resource and return to it again and again for ideas about how to manage your anger in difficult situations.

Advance Planning: The Key to Real-Life Anger Management

Learning to cope with visualized anger scenes is one thing. Managing your anger in the face of real-life provocations is quite another. All the practicing you've done with anger inoculation has served to give you more effective coping skills. Now it's time to make a strong commitment to use these skills where it counts—with your friends, family, and coworkers.

Exercise: Anger Planning**

This anger planning exercise has six sections: anger precipitants, trigger thoughts, coping thoughts, relaxation, coping behavior, and problem solving. Right now, fill in the Anger Planning Exercise using a recent provocation as an example situation. Start off by writing down all the anger precipitants in the situation. Mostly these would be the actual events, although precipitants might include memories or even feelings that preceded your anger. For trigger thoughts, write down every inflammatory thought that fueled your anger. For the coping thoughts section, we suggest that you review the Best Coping Thoughts Exercise that you completed earlier in the chapter. Try to find several that would be useful to manage your anger in this particular situation. In the relaxation section, write in the specific relaxation skill that you feel would be most effective while facing this particular provocation. Under coping behavior, try to develop at least one strategy that might keep this situation from escalating in the future. Use the list you created in the Best Coping Behaviors Exercise for ideas. Finally, in the problem-solving section, note any alternative solution or problem solving scenario you can think of. Do you have any idea of how you could structure things to avoid this problem in the future? Is there something you could say or do when you aren't upset that would alter the provocative situation in some way?

Anger Precipitants:
What events, memories, associations, or feelings preceded my anger?

Trigger Thoughts:
What inflammatory thoughts set off my anger?

Coping Thoughts:
Look at Best Coping Thoughts Worksheet for help.

Relaxation:
How can I use my relaxation skills in this situation (e.g., take a deep breath before I say anything, etc.)?

Coping Behavior:
What can I say or do that will calm things down?

Problem Solving:
Is there a way to solve this problem and avoid conflict?

** Adapted from *Overcoming Situational and General Anger* by Jerry Deffenbacher and Matthew McKay.

Here's an example of how Roger, a short-order cook, completed the Anger Planning Exercise.

Anger Precipitants:

Thelma (waitress) takes a long time picking up her orders. The server shelf fills up and I have nowhere to put new orders.

Trigger Thoughts:

Where's Mrs. Molasses? She's slower than a damn double amputee. She's lazy. She's screwing me up.

Coping Thoughts:

Cool down, you can handle this. You can solve the problem and chill. She's probably doing the best she can.

Relaxation:

Deep breath; use phrase, Let it be. Relax my tight shoulders.

Coping Behavior:

Stop constantly ringing the bell and trying to get her attention; put the order under the warmer and wait till she asks for it.

Problem Solving:

Ask restaurant owner about a second server shelf.

At the end of this chapter, you'll find multiple copies of this exercise, labeled Anger Planning Worksheet. You are encouraged to fill out the worksheet for chronic provocations and anger situations you can anticipate during the coming week. Anger planning is an excellent tool to make sure you have effective responses to any upset or provocation that you can anticipate.

Homework

1. Continue to track your anger experiences and coping efforts using Anger Log III.
2. For any anger situation where you didn't respond adequately, fill out an Anger Planning Worksheet. Draw on your Best Coping Thoughts and Best Coping Behaviors Exercises to complete the worksheet. If you have difficulty developing appropriate coping thoughts for a specific provocation, use a Creating Coping Thoughts Worksheet.

Anger Log III

Provocative Situation Sensory Input (Objective data from what you hear, see, and touch	The Screen (Your conclusions, assumptions, interpretations, beliefs, and trigger thoughts	Anger Rating 0–100	Coping Strategies Breathing, relaxation, coping thoughts, coping behaviors.	Anger Rating 0–100	Outcomes Rating -10 to +10 Self	Others

CREATING COPING THOUGHTS—Worksheet

Complete the following for each significant trigger thought in an anger situation.

1. Trigger thoughts that inflame my anger:
   a.
   b.
   c.
2. Anger distortions that underlie my trigger thoughts:
   a.
   b.
   c.
3. Counterresponse plan for each of my trigger thoughts (e.g., looking for exceptions, alternative explanations, preferences instead of shoulds, etc.). Revised trigger thought based on each counterresponse plan.
   a. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   b. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

   c. Counterresponse plan:

      Revised trigger thought:

4. Helpful coping thoughts (see General Coping Thoughts List earlier in this chapter):
   a.
   b.
   c.

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ANGER PLANNING—Worksheet

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Trigger Thoughts:
What inflammatory thoughts set off my anger?

Coping Thoughts:
Look at Best Coping Thoughts Worksheet for help.

Relaxation:
How can I use my relaxation skills in this situation (e.g., take a deep breath before I say anything, etc.)?

Coping Behavior:
What can I say or do that will calm things down?

Problem Solving:
Is there a way to solve this problem and avoid conflict?

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